WINTER 1932

CINEMA QUARTERLY

IN THIS NUMBER

JOHN GRIERSON
SEYMOUR STERN
G. F. DALTON
CHARLES GRAVES
KAREL SANTAR
ALEXANDER WERTH
BASIL WRIGHT
FORSYTH HARDY
LEONTINE SAGAN
in an interview

etc. etc.

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CINEMA QUARTERLY

Edited by NORMAN WILSON Review Editor: FORSYTH HARDY

London Correspondent: BASIL WRIGHT

Volume 1 Number 2 Winter 1932

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CINEMA QUARTERLY
WINTER 1932

DOCUMENTARY (I)

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JOHN GRIERSON

DOCUMENTARY is a clumsy description, but let it stand. The French who first used the term only meant travelogue. It gave them a solid high sounding excuse for the shimmying (and otherwise discursive) exoticisms of the Vieux Colombier. Meanwhile documentary has gone on its way. From shimmying exoticisms it has gone on to include dramatic films like *Moana, Earth,* and *Turksib.* And it will presently include other kinds as different in form and intention from *Moana,* as *Moana* was from *Voyage au Congo.*

So far we have regarded all films made from natural material as coming within the category. The use of natural material has been regarded as the vital distinction. Where the camera shot on the spot (whether it shot newsreel items or magazine items or discursive interests or dramatised interests or educational films or scientific films proper or *Changs* or *Rangos*) in that fact was documentary. This array of species is, of course, quite unmanageable in criticism, and we shall have to do something about it. They all represent different qualities of observation, different intentions in observation, and, of course, very different powers and ambitions at the stage of organising material. I propose, therefore, after a brief word on the lower categories, to use the documentary description exclusively of the higher.

The newsreel is still just a speedy snip-snap of some utterly unimportant ceremony. Its skill is in the speed with which

the babblings of a politician (gazing sternly into the camera) are transferred to fifty million relatively unwilling ears in a couple of days or so. The magazine items (once a week) have adopted the original *Tit-Bits* manner of observation. The skill they represent is a purely journalistic skill. They describe novelties novelly. With their money-making eye (their almost only eye) glued like the newsreels to vast and speedy audiences, they avoid on the one hand the consideration of solid material, and escape, on the other, the solid consideration of any material. Within these limits they are often brilliantly done. (*cf.* the Phyllis Ward item in a recent Cinemagazine.) But ten in a row would bore the average human to death. Their reaching out for the flippant or popular touch is so completely far-reaching that it dislocates something. Possibly taste; possibly commonsense. You may take your choice at those little theatres where you are invited to gad around the world in fifty minutes. It takes only that long—in these days of great invention—to see almost everything.

"Interests" proper improve mightily with every week, though heaven knows why. The market (particularly the English market) is stacked against them. With two-feature programmes the rule, there is neither space for the short *and* the Mickey *and* the magazine, nor money left to pay for the short. But by good grace, some of the renters throw in the short with the feature. This first considerable branch of cinematic illumination tends, therefore, to be the gift that goes with the pound of tea; and like all gestures of the grocery mind it is not very liable to cost much. Whence my wonder at improving qualities. Consider, however, the very frequent beauty and very great skill of exposition in recent Ufa shorts like *Turbulent Timber,* in the sports shorts from Metro-Goldwyn, in the *Secrets of Nature* shorts from Bruce Woolf, and the Fitzpatrick travel talks. Together they have brought the popular lecture to a pitch undreamed of, and even impossible in the days of magic lanterns. In this little we progress.

These films, of course, would not like to be called lecture films, but this, for all their disguises, is what they are. They do not dramatise, they do not even dramatise an episode: they describe, and even expose, but in any aesthetic sense, only rarely reveal. Herein is their formal limit, and it is unlikely that they will make any considerable contribution to the fuller art of documentary. How indeed can they? Their silent form is cut to the commentary, and shots are arranged

arbitrarily to point the gags or conclusions. This is not a matter of complaint, for the lecture film must have increasing value in entertainment, education and propaganda. But it is as well to establish the formal limits of the species.

This indeed is a particularly important limit to record, for beyond the newsmen and the magazine men and the lecturers (comic or interesting or exciting or only rhetorical) one begins to wander into the world of documentary proper, into the only world in which documentary can hope to achieve the ordinary virtues of an art. Here we pass from the plain (or fancy) descriptions of natural material, to arrangements, re-arrangements, and creative shapings of it.

First principles. (1) We believe that the cinema's capacity for getting around, for observing and selecting from life itself, can be exploited in a new and vital art form. The studio films largely ignore this possibility of opening up the screen on the real world. They photograph acted stories against artificial backgrounds. Documentary would photograph the living scene and the living story. (2) We believe that the original (or native) actor, and the original (or native) scene, are better guides to a screen interpretation of the modern world. They give cinema a greater fund of material. They give it power over a million and one movements, and power over a million and one images. They give it power of interpretation over more complex and astonishing happenings in the real world than the studio mind can conjure up or the studio mechanician recreate. (3) We believe that the materials and the stories thus taken from the raw can be finer (more real in the philosophic sense) than the acted article. Spontaneous gesture has a special value on the screen. Cinema has a sensational capacity for enhancing the movement which tradition has formed or time worn smooth. Its arbitrary rectangle specially reveals movement; it gives it maximum pattern in space and time. Add to this that documentary can achieve an intimacy of knowledge and effect impossible to the shimsham mechanics of the studio, and the lily-fingered interpretations of the metropolitan actor.

I do not mean in this minor manifesto of beliefs to suggest that the studios cannot in their own manner produce works of art to astonish the world. There is nothing (except the Woolworth intentions of the people who run them) to prevent the studios going really high in the manner of theatre or the manner of fairy tale. My separate claim for documentary is simply that in its use of the living article, there is *also* an opportunity to perform creative work. I mean, too, that

the choice of the documentary medium is as gravely distinct a choice as the choice of poetry instead of fiction. Dealing with different material, it is, or should be, dealing with it to different aesthetic issues from those of the studio. I make this distinction to the point of asserting that the young director cannot, in nature, go documentary and go studio both.

In my recent article on Flaherty for *Cinema Quarterly,* I indicated how one great exponent had walked away from the studio: how he came to grips with the essential story of the Eskimos, then with the Samoans, then latterly with the people of the Aran Islands: and at what point the documentary director in him diverged from the studio intention of Hollywood. The main point of the story was this. Hollywood wanted to impose a ready-made dramatic shape on the raw material. It wanted Flaherty, in complete injustice to the living drama on the spot, to build his Samoans into a rubber stamp drama of sharks and bathing belles. It failed in the case of *Moana;* it succeeded (through Van Dyke) in the case of *White Shadows of the South Seas,* and (through Murnau) in the case of *Tabu.* In the last examples it was at the expense of Flaherty, who severed his association with both.

With Flaherty it became an absolute principle that the story must be taken from the location, and that it should be (what he considers) the essential story of the location. His drama, therefore, is a drama of days and nights, of the round of the year's seasons, of the fundamental fights which give his people sustenance, or make their community life possible, or build up the dignity of the tribe.

Such an interpretation of subject-matter reflects, of course, Flaherty's particular philosophy of things. A succeeding documentary exponent is in no way obliged to chase off to the ends of the earth in search of old time simplicity, and the ancient dignities of man against the sky. Indeed, if I may for the moment represent the opposition, I hope the Neo-Rousseauism implicit in Flaherty's work dies with his own exceptional self. Theory of naturals apart, it represents an escapeism (a wan and distant eye) which tends in lesser hands to sentimentalism. However it be shot through with vigour of Lawrentian poetry, it must always fail to develop a form adequate to the more immediate material of the modern world. For it is not only the fool that has his eyes on the ends of the earth. It is sometimes the poet: sometimes, even the great poet (as Cabell in his *Beyond Life* will

brightly inform you). This, however, is the very poet who on every classic theory of society from Plato to Trotsky, should be removed bodily from the Republic. Loving every Time but his own, and every Life but his own, he avoids coming to grips with the creative job in so far as it concerns society. In the business of ordering most present chaos, he does not use his powers.

Question of theory and practice apart, Flaherty illustrates better than anyone the first principles of documentary. (1) It must master its material on the spot, and come in intimacy to ordering it. Flaherty digs himself in for a year, or two maybe. He lives with his people till the story is told 'out of himself.' (2) It must follow him in his distinction between description and drama. I think we shall find that there are other forms of drama or, more accurately, other forms of film, than the one he chooses; but it is important to make the primary distinction between a method which only describes the surface values of a subject, and the method which more explosively reveals the reality of it. You photograph the natural life, but you also, by your juxtaposition of detail, create an interpretation of it.

This final creative intention established, several methods are possible. You may, like Flaherty, go for a story form, passing in the ancient manner from the individual to the environment, to the environment transcended or not transcended, to the consequent honours of heroism. Or you may not be so interested in the individual. You may think that the individual life is no longer capable of cross-sectioning reality. You may believe that its particular belly-aches are of no consequence in a world which complex and impersonal forces command, and conclude that the individual as a self-sufficient dramatic figure is outmoded. When Flaherty tells you that it is a devilish noble thing to fight for food in a wilderness, you may, with some justice, observe that you are more concerned with the problem of people fighting for food in the midst of plenty. When he draws your attention to the fact that Nanook's spear is grave in its upheld angle, and finely rigid in its down-pointing bravery, you may, with some justice, observe that no spear, held however bravely by the individual, will master the crazy walrus of international finance. Indeed you may feel that in individualism is a yahoo tradition largely responsible for our present anarchy, and deny at once both the hero of decent heroics (Flaherty) and the hero of indecent ones (studio). In this case you will feel vaguely that you want your drama in terms of some

cross-section of reality which will reveal the essentially co-operative or mass nature of society: leaving the individual to find his honours in the swoop of creative social forces. In other words, you are liable to abandon the story form, and seek like the modern exponent of poetry and painting and prose, a matter and method more satisfactory to the mind and spirit of the time.

Here begin the real theoretical troubles of documentary and the agonies of financing it against the forces of romanticism. I propose to leave that story (with Ruttmann and the Russians, the E.M.B. gang, and the lads from Switzerland) for another article.

(*Note: Attention is drawn to John Grierson's review of Elton's VOICE OF THE WORLD on page 117 as having a direct bearing on this article.—Editor.*)

LONDON FILM EXHIBITION

An exhibition of cinematography was held during November and December, at the Royal Photographic Society's galleries in Russell Square, London. A modern section consisted of cameras, projectors and accessories for silent and sound films, portable apparatus being included. The historical section, from the Will Day Collection and the Science Museum, South Kensington, contained some of the early devices for showing movement which were of prime significance in the development of cinematography—from the Anamorphoscope (1635), which rectified distorted figures in a cylindrical mirror; and the Zoetrope (1838), in which a circular band of figures is viewed through successive slits; to the Lumière combined camera, printer and projector and the Animatograph, with which the first public displays of films in England were projected in 1896. Other exhibits were early films made by Friese-Greene and others, and some of the plates of Muybridge's animal locomotion. A comprehensive exhibit of stills from well-known films of Europe and the United States, including a few from Spain, Portugal, Holland, Belgium, and Czecho-Slovakia, was notable for a considerable group from Japan (lent by the Edinburgh Film Guild), in which Western influences were discernable. British Instructional made an excellent show with its brilliant scientific stills. A pleasing feature was the inclusion of amateur and experimental work. Unfortunately, many of the stills bore no mark of origin, and the method of cataloguing did not assist identification.

MARK SEGAL.

QUE VIVA MEXICO!

THE FATE OF EISENSTEIN'S AMERICAN FILM

●

SEYMOUR STERN

"WORK OF GENIUS BARBAROUSLY MUTILATED!" So writes Agustin Aragon Leiva, well-known Mexican intellectual and Eisenstein's special assistant for one year on *Que Viva Mexico!* The line is the title to Leiva's flaming article in *El Nacional,* one of the leading newspapers of Mexico City. This bitter exclamation gives an accurate hint of the vandalism now being perpetrated on Eisenstein's great Mexican epic.

I, having seen a large part of the "rushes" and two of the cut versions, can testify to the justice of Leiva's charge as well as to the appraisal of the film's artistic value. A great deal has already been written about *Que Viva Mexico!* in the United States. In order to substantiate as solidly as possible at this time the quality, character, and general purpose of the production, I shall quote, in the manner of a brief digest, certain important remarks of several people who have seen the material and have vividly described their impressions of it.

Discussing the technique and purpose of the production, Leiva writes as follows:—

"Within the plan originally conceived by Eisenstein, the film *Que Viva Mexico!* which was to have been shown simultaneously in Mexico, Moscow, Paris and New York, included a prologue by way of introduction to the drama of Mexico. In this prologue, the connections between past and present, were presented in a masterly manner. In Eisenstein's film there were no professional actors, no scenes or artificial and candied sets, no artificial lights: the scene was nature, and the actors humble peasants, soldiers, and men of the people. Sound technique was extremely original. Only voices, as in the chorus of Greek tragedy, without dialogues or redundant commentaries. The photographic technique was simply amazing, worthy by all standards, and even superior to the former photographic achievements of Eisenstein."

According to the same writer, who knew Eisenstein's basic conception intimately, the film

". . . deals with all our historical and prehistorical periods, with our main geographical sections that have remarkably conditioned

collective life, and with all influences that are foreign . . . the subject of the film is *the whole Mexico, past, present and future.*"

The structure of the film is

"like a symphony, in which different movements are unified in spirit and form through the expression of the same *idea* of a superior order," and "the cinematographic melodies have their own counterpoint, and every one requires a different harmonisation. In this fashion there are as many rhythms, graphic compositions and photographies, and finally, montages as there are parts in the film."

This account, compounded from *Experimental Cinema No. 4,* and the leading Mexican newspapers, *El Nacional* and *El Universal,* is echoed by another Mexican, Adolfo Best-Maugard, who, knowing less of Eisenstein's intention, but grasping the essential form of the film, writes as follows in the *Theatre Arts Monthly* of November (1932) :—

"Modern cinema is *Viva Mexico!* a new achievement of a new technique, a more amazing technique than that of *Potemkin,* perhaps most adequately described, I should say, as 'symphonic cinema.' Eisenstein's greatest delight in Mexico was the opportunity to create in a new way his theory of cinema . . . that only picturesque and genuine sets and people can make his unique movies; *not newsreel, but the co-ordination of realities in a symphonic pattern giving astonishing effects . . . movies as a fine art.*" (Italics are mine.).

Whether we agree or not, that the "picturesque and genuine sets, etc.," constituted the sole or "greatest delight" of Eisenstein, a Communist director, in the land of the peon ruled by the Standard Oil Company, it is a fact that Eisenstein deliberately set out to embody in *Viva Mexico!* perhaps for the first time, the old theory and conception of *symphonic cinema;* i.e., a complex, multiple-rhythmed film-composition, rich in counterpoints and mature in its underlying architecture.

As to the substance bodied forth in this structure, Leiva says: "The film is a poem of a sociological character. Rather an interpretative essay on Mexican evolution." In sheer rhapsody over Eisenstein's unbelievable achievement, he declares that "Eisenstein has practically stolen from the Mexican nation all her secrets, dreams and feelings accumulated during five thousand years."

Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that everyone who has been permitted to see either the "rushes" or the rough cut that Eisenstein edited for the Mexican Government, has been virtually "swept away" by the material and by the power of Eisenstein's idea. Thus, Laurence Stallings, well-known Hollywood scenarist, writing in the *New York Sun,* of

March 29 (1932), that he was privileged to view this rough cut, states that "though a hastily assembled affair, it was even then the finest cinema I had ever seen." He further writes:—

"Mr Stuart Chase, in an excellent piece of journalism collated with fine enthusiasm the best of information about Mexico, and stated implicitly its advantages by contrast with a country of idle factories and frantic bread-lines. *But all the books ever written on this phase are nothing to Eisenstein's film. . . . Eisenstein has done the first complete book of the cinema.* . . . It is actually, the book of Mexico, from the first syllable of its gorgeous architectural relics to the last white collar along the streets of the new towns. . . . The great imperishable architecture of that country to the south of us; the warm forceful women of Tehuantepec; the straight-backed men of the high plateaus; the survivals of Mayan gods rubbing elbows with the calvary of Rome; all the great flowering colours and textures of a country, from the first syllable of its history to the last shrug of a peon's shoulders, are locked in this film." (Italics mine.).

To these extollations may be added the opinion of Morris Helprin, who emphatically pronounces *Que Viva Mexico!* "the first film made in the Western hemisphere to assume the mantle of maturity. The furthest step yet from the idiocies of corn-fed Hollywood."

It is unlikely that any other film produced since movies began has met with such acclaim, such vivid and spontaneous enthusiasm, as Eisenstein's Mexican opus. And it is equally unlikely that any other film, perhaps any other art work at all, has been so prematurely doomed to destruction.

Eisenstein's backers have hired a professional Hollywood cutter (an "old-timer," and therefore, from the American viewpoint, very "wise"), to edit a film for which Eisenstein himself had declared that a very advanced and radically new type of montage was needed. To date, three out of six or seven of the episodes which collectively comprise *Que Viva Mexico!* have been edited, or rather "mis-edited," by this cutter, with results too painful to be described. And the backers apparently have no intention of stopping this farce, despite the unanimous condemnation of the results by people who have been permitted to view them.

This stupidly cut material may be likened to a beautiful stained glass window, the fragments of which are individually magnificent but collectively meaningless. The design is lacking. The beauty of *form*—that very quality which is the key to Eisenstein's genius, and which represents his main

claim to cinematic distinction—is as non-existent in this mess as if Eisenstein had never intended it to be present. In the hands of the backers, the film has become a succession of beautiful images strung together in a disjointed and totally meaningless "continuity."

The history of Eisenstein's Mexican film is too lengthy and too complicated a matter to be given thorough review in this article. The essential detail is the circumstance of its origin.

Rejected by Hollywood, Eisenstein cast about desperately for a private backer who would enable him to make a film on American soil. He broached the idea, with grave misgivings, to Upton Sinclair, America's most renowned "Socialist"; Sinclair pounced on the suggestion hungrily.

What caused Sinclair to take up Eisenstein's proposition with such impassioned enthusiasm is something not easy to define at this stage of the film's history. We may never know exactly what was in his head when he started canvassing his wealthy friends and supporters in the millionaire colony of Pasadena (California), but I believe that Sinclair himself has unwittingly betrayed his underlying motive for backing Eisenstein's Mexican venture. In April of this year he issued one of his well-known self-advertising pamphlets (which he privately distributes by the thousand throughout the world), and in mentioning the Eisenstein film, he wrote as follows:—

"As I write, Eisenstein is in New York, about to sail for Russia, where he will cut the picture. He takes with him some thirty-five miles of the most gorgeous film you ever laid eyes on. When it is assembled and released, it will make a revolution in the art. Incidentally, it should make a great deal of money; and as neither my wife nor I care to become promoters for profit, we have pledged ourselves to use this money for the purpose of putting sets of my books into public libraries all over the world. We have established The Sinclair Foundation for the purpose, and we are making over to it our interest in the picture."

No wonder, when Eisenstein learned of Sinclair's intention, he became furious and finally broke with his manager!

Eisenstein had been put "under the supervision" of a man from the backwoods of the State of Mississippi, who, to use Eisenstein's own words, "knew nothing about art and still less about cinema." It was under the dictatorship of such a man that the director of *Potemkin* and *Ten Days That*

Shook the World was expected to proceed with his Mexican opus. As might have been expected, however, the result was extreme antagonism between the great Russian director and his manager from Mississippi.

The growth of this antagonism was fatal—fatal to Eisenstein and fatal to the production. To Eisenstein because it drove him to adopt certain ruthless tactics out of sheer desperation in order to save his beloved "sociological poem" on Mexico; to the production because it gave birth to the idea among the backers of eventually depriving Eisenstein of his interest in, and artistic control of, the picture after the shooting was over.

His name became anathema on their lips. One of the backers has been widely quoted as having said that, even if he lost every cent on this picture, he "never wanted Eisenstein to see one foot of it again." To-day the names of Eisenstein's backers are a curse on the lips of all Mexican intellectuals to whom *Que Viva Mexico!* would have meant a new vision of their country, the infusion of a new spirit, perhaps even a regenerated passion in the Mexican people.

In order to complete the saga of Mexico—a saga of past, present and future, romance of Aztec, Toltec and *meztizo,* of *maguey,* desert, jungle and volcano, epic of the "great race of the ancient Mayas," and of the Spanish conquest, spectacle extraordinary of a culture and an evolution as old as the North American continent—in order to complete this architectonic work, Eisenstein threw discretion and tactics to the winds. He did a thing, which, from the point of view of the Russian Proletariat and the World Revolution, is almost unforgivable, but which, when considered as the outburst of a really impassioned intellectual and artist, is very understandable: he violated his contract with the Soviet Government.

When he returned to the Soviet Union, long after the time he had agreed to return, he met with a cold reception. All things considered, the Soviet Government treated Eisenstein with a magnanimity and a generosity which he would hardly have received at the hands of any other government. But the Soviet film institutions—Soyouskino in Russia, and Amkino in the United States—have to this day done nothing to save the Mexican film for their most eminent director.

After Eisenstein had left the United States for Russia, Upton Sinclair, fearing commercial pressure perhaps, from the other backers, or fearing the more disagreeable and less profitable pressure of public opinion, or both, and perhaps seeing the Sinclair Foundation fly out of the window, made several attempts to save the film. He offered the uncut material to Amkino in New York for Eisenstein to finish and for the Soviet film organisations to exploit on a percentage basis. However, he wanted some $90,000 in cash, and this was a sum which Amkino was altogether unable to afford. The material was accordingly returned to its ill-fated resting place in Sinclair's Pasadena mansion.

Whereupon, concluding that Eisenstein and *Que Viva Mexico!* were separated forever, the backers found it necessary to avenge themselves on the Russian director for the worries he had caused them and the defiance he had showed them. Not caring a whit for the artistic and intellectual integrity of the film, they knew only that they had on their hands 200,000 feet of exposed negative, that is—200,000 feet of what Edmund Wilson had described as "the supreme masterpiece of the movies." The word "montage" was so meaningless to them, that they did not even pause to consider that it was precisely in the editing, in the job that comes *after* the shooting, that Eisenstein's genius surpasses itself.

So they proceeded to make overtures to Hollywood producing companies. They tried everything they could to sell the shots of *Que Viva Mexico!* piecemeal to commercial concerns for use in newsreels, travelogues, "educational" films, etc., etc., and they made special efforts to sell what they imagined Eisenstein had intended as "scenic" shots for a Clark Gable version of Mexico.

So little did they understand of Eisenstein's film, so insensitive have they remained to the ethnic and philosophical import of Eisenstein's intention, that they actually imagined, on the basis of certain landscapes and still-life shots photographed for future "overtonal" use, that Eisenstein had made a series of "travel pictures" of Mexico, with light romances thrown in for "entertainment"!

Rumours of the backers' desire to get rid of the fruits of a year and a half of Eisenstein's labour in Mexico were soon current in every film circle in America. The fact soon

became known that the backers were up against a wall: they had not succeeded in selling a single shot, and at the same time they were at a loss to know how to edit the film themselves.

And so there now began a shameful campaign on the part of cutters, budding "artists," former film-art theatre managers, and sundry other types peculiar to the American movie racket, to be given an opportunity to cut this material. Sinclair's telephone in Passadena grew hot with calls from Hollywood "geniuses" who were ready and eager to step in and teach Eisenstein how to make "montage." To these vultures, suddenly so wise in the methodology of montage which every one of them normally scorns and ridicules, the thought never occurred that for anyone except Eisenstein to touch one single foot of this great film was already, *ipso facto*, an outrage. The latest move toward the destruction of the picture is the negotiation with an independent travelogue concern, grown fat by flooding the world market with a cheap, banal and pseudo-educational type of "travelogue."

In a word, the fate of the film itself already overshadows the historical tragedy which it was intended to depict. It is without doubt the greatest single tragedy of the cinema and one of the saddest in the history of art.

Due in part to the protest and agitation of the Western editors of *Experimental Cinema*, in Hollywood and Mexico City, a number of private protests have already been made, but without effect. The protests have all been isolated and private. The idea of organised and open protest did not take root until the ruthless determination of the backers was no longer a matter of conjecture, but of established fact. The question now is, what is to become of this monumental picture?

Three roads are open to the backers. The first and most obvious is that they may continue their present policy of destruction, selling the shots right and left to every muddling travelogue company or to every two-by-four director or cameraman whose miserable studio-films require "padding" or a "touch of novelty." Or, as an alternative, they may continue having the film cut up and eventually exhibit it in the hope that it will prove to be something other than a model of mediocrity and unimaginative flatness. But in this case, no matter how good the result might be, allowing for a miracle, it would still not be Sergei Eisenstein's film. And

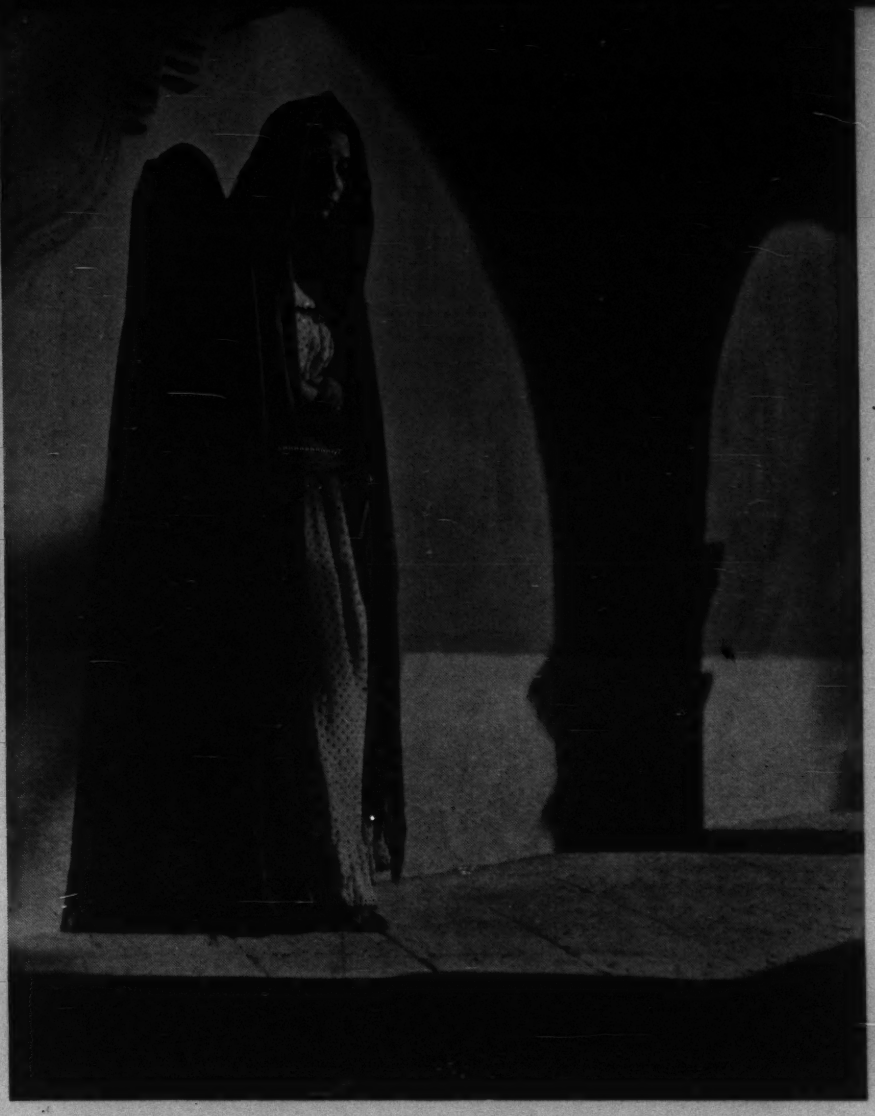
in the event that they choose to adopt either of these two modes of destroying Eisenstein's picture, the backers must prepare themselves for an international attack from all friends of Eisenstein and all lovers of the cinema.

The second road would not please those among the backers who are clamouring most loudly for their money, but it would be a surer and certainly more noble method of realising returns than the first one. The backers may place the film in safe keeping, in a vault, and keep it there until such time as Eisenstein returns once again into the full favour of the Soyouskino officials. There is every reason to believe that at an early future date, if indeed not already, Eisenstein, by power of his energy and ideas, will have more than atoned for the violation of his contract and, in return for invaluable services rendered, the Soviet Power will doubtless be sufficiently mollified to purchase the 200,000 feet of *Que Viva Mexico!* from the backers, and at a price that will fully compensate the expenditures and delay. The growing likelihood of official recognition of the Soviet Government by the Government of the United States, within the next twelvemonth, will render such negotiations between the backers and the Soviet Power an hundredfold easier.

The third course is to exhaust every possible method of saving the picture for Eisenstein, and failing this, to destroy the film utterly, permitting no one to touch a single frame of it. Had they lost their $75,000 in a bank crash, or had they been swindled out of it by ruthless business men, they would have had to resign themselves to a fate much less noble than that of financing a great film which Eisenstein was denied the opportunity to finish. Meantime, it should be the task of every individual to whom "cinema" is not just a word of six letters, to protest to Upton Sinclair, as representative of the backers, against any further continuance of the vandalism of *Viva Mexico*!

More than this. So long as there remains any danger that the film may be sold in pieces by Eisenstein's moneymen, or that it may be released without having been edited by Eisenstein himself, a concerted plan should be made, *without delay*, by every friend of Eisenstein and every advanced film-society of the world, for international propaganda against it—and for *unconditional boycott*.

Send protest letters and cables to Upton Sinclair, Beverly Hills, California, U.S.A.



From Eisenstein's "Que Viva Mexico!" The girl of the tragic "Maguey" episode: and the "fireworks bull," used by the peons as an instrument of revenge during their revolt.

Courtesy of Augustin Aragon Leiva

Advance stills from "She," a new Soviet production directed by A. Khokhalova.

THE MISCONCEPTION OF "MONTAGE"

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G. F. DALTON

WHAT *is* montage? We all know, of course, that it is a very handy word to impress the general public with. But what does it mean? Those who use it most frequently often fight shy of defining it.

I suggest that the conception "montage" is an offshoot of the Kuleshov theory of film composition, and that, in fact, it stands for the process of creative composition postulated by that theory.

Kuleshov's theory has by now attained the position of a fundamental dogma. It is backed by the great authority of Pudovkin and Eisenstein, and therefore claims the credit for their achievements. It pervades every article on film aesthetic, and among the *avant-garde* of every country its truth is unquestioned. Nevertheless, I propose to demolish it. Being a scenario writer, I must; for I cannot assent to a theory which makes the director the sole creative artist, and the scenarist a mere assistant.

I take my account of the theory from a source of undeniable orthodoxy, Pudovkin's book on film technique. "In every art there must be, firstly, a material, and secondly, a method of composing this material specially adapted to this art. The musician has sounds as material, and composes them in time. The painter's materials are colour, and he combines them in space on the surface of the canvas. . . . . The material in film-work consists of pieces of film, and the composition method is their joining together in a particular, creatively-discovered order. . . . Film art does not begin when the artists act, and the various scenes are shot—this is only the preparation of the material. Film art begins from the moment when the director begins to combine and join together the various pieces of film. By joining them in

various combinations, in different orders, he obtains different results."

Now at the first glance it is clear that Kuleshov, or Pudovkin, does not mean what he says. The strict, literal sense of what he says implies this: The director sits in the cutting-room. Before him are various strips of film, which for some reason have not been numbered. From his knowledge of the theme, and from his sense of film grammar and style, he arranges these strips in their correct order—a task comparable to reassembling a jumble of words into a sentence. And this, and nothing but this is the act of creative composition!

If Kuleshov does mean this, very few will agree with him. Most of us agree that selection as well as arrangement is a necessary element in composition. This selection, also, cannot be simply the choice between several recorded versions of one scene—it must be the choice of the scenes themselves. But the scenes have already been shot; therefore, if the director's power of selection is to be real, all scenes which could possibly be relevant to the theme must be shot. Here we have the key to Eisenstein's huge expenditure of film in Mexico. But even his 150,000 feet are nothing compared to the amount of film it would be necessary to use on even the simplest theme, if the theory were strictly adhered to. Almost any subject may be relevant to any theme, and any single subject may be photographed from an infinite number of camera positions, under an infinite number of lighting conditions—to say nothing of the variations possible in the subject itself, which are also infinite. So that Eisenstein is actually almost as limited in his power of selection as any other director.

Kuleshov talks of the "preparation of the material"—a process wholly without analogue in any other art, although the theory is based on analogy. This is really a rather clumsy attempt to conceal the obvious fact that the *selection* of the material is made at an earlier stage, and does not come within the province of the director at all.

Kuleshov's fundamental error is that he treats of the process of composition as external—as a manipulation of physical objects; whereas it is really a manipulation of ideas. The analogy is false from the beginning. The musician does not make tentative noises on various instruments until he finds

the sounds he needs. His brain is already stocked with images of all the sounds ordinarily used in music, and he can sit in silence in his study and write out his score, knowing exactly how it will sound when played. The painter does not stand before a blank canvas with an equally blank mind; the picture is already formed in his brain, and he has merely to transfer it to the canvas. Similarly, the author of a film composes not strips of film, but mental images of them—not "shots" but "scenes." The creator of the film is the scenarist.

At the bottom of every notion, however wrong-headed, there must be some grain of truth. At the bottom of Kuleshov's theory is a dim perception of the peculiarity of the film art, that there is a double process of composition. The scenes of a film correspond to the words of a book; but whereas the latter are standardised and available for everyone, a scene of a film is unique, composed only for that film and incapable of being used for any other. Suppose that two scenario-writers make use even of such a conventional symbol as a skull for Death. The two resulting shots will nevertheless differ in camera position, lighting, and background, and if each appears in a film of high quality, they could not be transposed without substantial loss of effect. Kuleshov, it seems, has reasoned subconsciously thus:—
"The composition of scenes must be left to the scenarist, and to the cameraman interpretating the scenarist's instructions. But I am a director; therefore the director must be the real creative artist. Therefore the creative process must be the arrangement by the director of the scenes composed by the scenarist." But such a separation of function is, as I have shown, impossible. The theory of Kuleshov is contrary to analogy, contrary to experience, and contrary to reason. The director's function is interpretative; it corresponds to that of the conductor of an orchestra. The creative artist is not the director, but the scenarist.

There is no such thing as "montage." The duties of the director, after the film has been shot, are, firstly, to select the best shot of each scene (where more than one have been taken), and secondly, to cut each shot to its correct length, which is completely determined by the nature of the shot and by its context. Both these functions need skill, experience, and fine judgment; neither of them needs creative imagination. "Constructive cutting" is, of course, another mirage of similar origin.

It will naturally be asked, how do I account for the results obtained by the Soviet champions of the Kuleshov theory? The answer is simply that their instinct is better than their reason. From Pudovkin's book it is clear that he is himself responsible for the greater part of his own scenarios, and throughout the book his instinct and experience are struggling inarticulately against his theory. Dovjenko, René Clair, Chaplin, Dreyer, four names of the first rank in the cinema, write their own scenarios.

In actual production the theory has done little harm. Where it has done harm is in the obscuring of the proper relations of scenarist and director. As long as the scenarist is reduced to the position of a mere accessory before the fact, the progress of the film art is hindered. For this reason the Kuleshov theory, and with it the conceptions of "montage" and "constructive cutting," must be demolished. I hope I have performed the job satisfactorily.

THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF AMATEUR CINEMATOGRAPHERS

Arising from the *Era* Ciné Competition of 1931, the British Association of Amateur Cinematographers was founded with the object of bringing together the many interests involved in amateur film-making. This year it undertook the organization of the contest inaugurated by the *Era*, and also the selection of the British entries for the international competition of the Nederlandsche Smalfilmliga. A technical advice service, including the periodical issue of instructive papers, is available for members, and the Association is at present organising a film story contest, the winning entry of which is to be filmed by picked amateur workers. The address of the Hon. Secretary is, Geoffrey Collyer, 11 Soho Square, London, W.1.

The *B.A.A.C. Quarterly*, the first number of which has just been issued, contains particulars of the activities of the Association, an article on "thematic values," by G. A. Atkinson, and reviews of publications of interest to the amateur. "Despite most amateur efforts," says the editor, Dr L. E. C. Hughes, "a film is a peculiar form of artistic experience, sometimes realised in professional films." Such candour from the ciné movement is refreshing and encouraging.

LEONTINE SAGAN

INTERVIEWED BY FORSYTH HARDY

MAEDCHEN IN UNIFORM is one of the most eventful films of the year. By eventful I mean several things—chiefly that it is not one of those feckless films that come, blown high on the winds of publicity, drift down through the supers to the side-street "Salons," and die with the deflation of the ballyhoo which gave them birth. This German film has too much in it for that.

There is in the first place, its commercial success. Despite its German dialogue and the absence of obvious box-office elements, it has run for more than four months in London—longer than any other current film, British or American. There may be other aspects of this success; but surely it has demonstrated again to Wardour Street that a public does exist for intelligent and imaginative films. It has been eventful in another and perhaps incidental direction. As a direct result of the film's success, an English version of Christa Winslow's German play, "Gestern und Heute"—from which *Maedchen* is adapted—has been presented in London. Though not without precedent, it is certainly unusual for the theatre to follow the film, and the case makes an interesting contribution to the vexed question of theatre-film borrowing.

But *Maedchen in Uniform* has been eventful in a more personal manner. A year ago none of us had heard of Leontine Sagan, the woman who directed it. To-day she is one of the most respected figures in cinema, and this, her

first film, has secured at once the admiration of all who tend to take their cinema seriously. While this is her first film, she has produced many plays in Germany. By training she is a stage director, and has worked with Reinhardt and Barnovsky—as a teacher in the former's school. For some years she ran the English theatre in Berlin, and, in addition, played the leading parts in "Candida," "Hay Fever" and "The Silver Box." She produced "Gestern und Heute" as a play both in Berlin, and as I have already said, in London.

With so much stage experience, we might have expected Leontine Sagan to come to the cinema with a definite bias towards the technique of the theatre. But while the players in *Maedchen* have benefited enormously from the sympathetic co-operation of a trained stage director; and while the film itself owes something of its peculiar naturalness and integrity to the experience gained in a former stage production, there is never the slightest doubt of the filmic quality, or of the director's understanding of expression through cinema and appreciation of the essential individuality of the film. No one who has seen the sequence of the averted suicide towards the end of *Maedchen,* or the episode in which an undergraduate is sent down from Oxford in *Men of To-morrow,* will doubt for a moment Leontine Sagan's ability in cinema.

I found Leontine Sagan on the *Men of To-morrow* set at Elstree. The studio presented its customary blend of clutter and clamour, and I wondered, as I have wondered often before and since, how it is possible for a finished artistic production, clear and direct in its inspiration and sustained in its dramatic and emotional intensity, to emerge from so topsy-turvy a scene, so disturbing an atmosphere. The more I see of film production in the studios, the more I appreciate the desire of such artists as Flaherty, to escape from this sprawling, squabbling activity to some quieter and more inspiring scene. Shooting was in progress, and I watched the director patiently rehearse the players in their parts. It was with earnest endeavour such as this I thought, that the naturalness and sincerity of the performances in *Maedchen* were achieved.

There were other special aspects of the acting in this first film, Miss Sagan explained, when at length the sequence was completed, and there arose the tumult of preparation for the next shot. In *Maedchen* the parts were not taken by experienced actresses. Enthusiasm in the players was essen-

tial for the successful treatment of the theme, and to obtain it she went outside the theatre to the schools of drama, whose students were as yet unfamiliar with the traditions and technique of stage acting. Miss Sagan, however, does not believe with the Soviet directors that there is no place for the trained actor in the cinema, and that the film-maker should rely entirely on natural material, shaped to his purpose by selection and constructive cutting.

"Every film director I imagine, would prefer to work with trained actors," she said. "It is the ideal. But they ought to be trained, and not routine actors. If an actor has no knowledge of the art of acting, he has such difficulties that he cannot express himself freely."

Miss Sagan spoke of *Maedchen* with a warmth of feeling, behind which it was easy to visualise the inspired enthusiasm that went to the making of her first film, the spirit of co-operation between director, players and technicians, that gives it its peculiar balanced rhythm and sustained emotional quality. The co-operation was carried a step further than is customary. Instead of receiving fixed salaries, the players were given a permanent interest in the success of the film and put on a royalty basis. This is perhaps not a principle of remuneration possible of general application; but here, at least, it banished the spirit of star-exploitation, and resulted in a display of co-operative acting, such as we seldom find in the cinema.

From the particular case of *Maedchen*, discussion passed to the general principles of film production. Miss Sagan realises that the two poles of the film are its scenario and cutting, and is firm in her conviction that the director ought to control both. The advantages of such a method of production are obvious: the director has control of the theme from scenario to completed picture, and can concentrate every resource on its best expression. As yet there are not many film craftsmen with sufficient imagination and experience to undertake this single control in the studio. The case of Leontine Sagan, however, indicates that imagination and understanding are of greater value than experience.

The beneficial effect of a single authoritative voice in film production is apparent, when we compare *Maedchen in Uniform* with *Men of To-morrow*. It is obvious that, in the British film, she had less control, both with its scenario and in

its cutting. The theme is less directly defined than in the German picture, and the film does not have the same rhythmic balance. *Men of To-morrow* is based on Anthony Gibbs' *Young Apollo,* and an attempt has been made to stiffen the novel's theme by emphasising the clash of the individual with the institution—an Oxford undergraduate in rebellion against the traditions of the University. The source of the resultant somewhat disjointed effect may be traced partly to the scenario, where the theme has not been clearly defined, and partly to the cutting where emphasis has been laid on the story of adolescent love and jealously—drawn from *Young Apollo* —rather than on the main theme.

Miss Sagan is conscious of the occasional lack of rhythmical balance in *Men of To-morrow,* caused by the cutting of many scenes which seemed to her valuable, but which proved too long for the completed film. "I am a great believer in rhythmic and dynamic effects, as I had an opportunity of showing in *Maedchen in Uniform.* But there I had the advantage of preceding stage production, and knew already where the effects lay. If I could do *Men of To-morrow* again, I suppose I should do it quite differently."

An unusually frank confession this from a film director! I wonder whether such a feeling is common among directors when they see their completed work. Grierson once told me that were he to make *Drifters* again, it would take a quite different form. It is a pity, perhaps, that the cost of production prevents any director from ever making the experiment.

I asked Miss Sagan to estimate Germany's special contribution to cinema. The Germans, she commented, were a thoughtful and introspective people, whose entertainment was largely a matter of the mind. They were not content with the superficialities of life, but wished to probe more deeply into cause and effect. This quality was inevitably reflected in German films, which were for the most part psychological studies of varying depths and intensities. From *Caligari* to *Maedchen,* this psychological strain had been in evidence. It was the natural approach of the German to a subject.

"And *Men of To-morrow,*" I asked. "Will it also be a psychological study?" There may have been just a hint of national superiority in her voice as she replied "Oh no! Just a film for England and America." So.

SIGNIFICANT SPEECH

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CHARLES GRAVES

WHEN I think of the bad old days of cinema—the "living or animated pictures" as we called it then—when the train carrying King Edward to Delhi steamed into our faces, and instead of pulverising the camera man, as it ought to have done, dissipated itself in a flickering blank of light, the rapidity with which the screen has developed from an experiment into an art stands amazingly clear. There has been no equal development in the theatre, for the theatre is an old art, and some would have it a dying one. Until quite recently the drama—its technical side at least—stood still, a little scared and fascinated by the young rival who was emptying its seats.

Indeed, I know of no art which, in this country, has been so content with the position it has gained as the drama. Not poetry, where the break with the past on the part of the left-wingers is so decided that modernist verse has the appearance of being an experiment rather than a development; not painting, which has devised an entirely new technique; certainly not music.

We need not marvel at the conservatism of the theatre or at the advance made by cinema. The theatre seemed firmly entrenched among our arts; it was an institution which had no rival; it felt secure: the drama of the screen was new, and like all new things had the attraction of novelty. There was a time when the stage was in its infancy, and when the appeal it had was very similar to that which cinema possesses to-day.

One has only to think of those old plays of Elizabeth's day, of their crudities, of their unashamed appeal to popular sentiment and emotion, of their pageantry, of their very titles: *The Maid's Tragedy, A Woman Killed by Kindness, The White Devil*—plays which drew all classes across Thames to see them—to realise that the theatre once possessed a hold it has hardly ever had since and is perhaps never likely to possess again.

The White Devil! Why, only the other day I read that very title in large letters over a cinema, nor did it surprise me, though I knew quite well that the film inside was not an adaptation of Webster's drama.

But in the resemblance of those Sixteenth and early Seventeenth Century titles to the screen titles of the Twentieth Century I find shadowed forth an inner parallelism between the cinema of to-day and the stage of yesterday—the craving for sensationalism for the often crude but "living" drama which is capable of swaying men and women in the mass.

The theatre had, except in rare instances, lost that appeal, and the ease with which cinemas could be multiplied was of great advantage to the new art. To-day, when stage properties and an entire company of players may be packed into a box and sent through the post, when a manager, at a moment's notice, can take off one entertainment and substitute another which will please his audience better, the older art of the theatre finds itself at an extreme disadvantage in competition with its new rival.

The new influence is only beginning to be felt in theatreland as box-office returns become less and less. The revival of the chronicle play, following the success which attended the production of *Abraham Lincoln,* was, though perhaps unconsciously, a symptom that something was wrong and an attempt to repair the defect. To-day the effort seems for the moment to be directed towards a reorientation of stage technique rather than of dramatic subject. Plays are to appeal to us through novel or artistic settings, such as those which have been devised by Komisarjevsky, whose production of *Hatter's Castle* aimed, by the grouping of several sets in a single frame, at giving unity to a play which emphatically lacked unity and artistry. We are to be shocked into attention.

On the other hand, there is a tendency to develop the theatre's mechanical side, as at the new Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-on-Avon, where a rolling stage has been installed. The effect of this innovation is to enable the theatrical producer to challenge cinema on its own ground, though usually for a few brief moments of climax. By its means three sets can be rolled into one and an audience presented with a panoramic picture of Roman or medieval street scenes. The device lends itself not only to pure pageantry,

but can be utilised also with dramatic effect, and yet it is almost certain that the same results could be obtained with greater artistic economy and with imaginative rather than realistic staging.

The mechanical contrivances at Stratford are numerous. By hydraulic means lower and upper stages can be used simultaneously. There is also a proscenium stage and the opportunity for novel exits and entrances. The sudden uprush of the Roman crowd from the orchestra pit, when the curtain went up on *Julius Caesar,* broke down the footlight barrier between the audience and the players, but it is in the development of the proscenium stage that the theatre will probably find its greatest salvation. After all, the art of cinema has so far proved incapable of utilising human personality as the theatre can utilise it. Up to the present it has failed lamentably so far as the spoken word is concerned, so much so that many people regarded the advent of the talkie as retrograde, and quite a number may still be found who genuinely prefer the silent film. But the talkie apparatus was an essential step in the development of cinema, without which it was no more than " inexplicable dumb show."

And yet in those days when we lacked it, it can hardly be said that we missed it. There was, it is true, a vague feeling that we only needed the human voice to complete the picture, yet the silence of the film soon established itself as a convention, and the art of cinema, though as yet undeveloped, was perhaps a purer art by reason of the fact that it appealed to us through a single sense. I do not ask that my mother's photograph on the table there should be capable of speaking to me with my mother's voice, and yet I have as perfect a right to expect it as to expect that the actors in a screen story shall speak. I accept the limitations of the photographer's art.

I do not think, however, that for the ordinary purpose of the commercial cinema—that is for screen drama—the use of sound is likely to be abandoned. The old convention has been so utterly destroyed that anyone who now sees a silent picture is continuously conscious of its limitations.

The employment of speech on the screen is in its infancy, and there must be many experiments before satisfaction is achieved. Yet of this we may be sure—that wherever speech is used it must be relevant and significant and, in the great

moments of tragedy, imaginative and moving. The Elizabethans were not swayed by plot and spectacle only, but by rhetoric and poetry. To-day the cinema still appeals mainly to the eye; it must also appeal to the ear in a manner in which it has so far not done. There is nothing so debasing to the national morale—though it is still far from being generally realised—as slovenly speech, for slovenly speech implies slovenly thinking, if not an entire absence of original thought.

Most of the speech which we hear to-day in the cinema is lacking in significant phrasing. The assistance which it renders to the action is on a low intellectual level. I am not criticising the use of "Americanisms," for one of the advantages of American slang is that it has given us back many words which were current in Elizabethan days and has added others of great vitality to our language. But these words are being used in a haphazard and indifferent manner, with the result that both speech and thought have become debased. The cinema must react against this tendency.

Happily our plight as a nation in this respect has not escaped attention, and a recent writer has pointed out what the age of Shakespeare owed to the teaching of Rhetoric in the schools and, conversely, what our own age has lost through its neglect. "Many Elizabethan playgoers," he writes,* "had no conception of what is meant by dramatic pattern or of the delight to be obtained from subtleties of speech. If they saw plenty of exciting incident, the working out of a romantic story, mixed with incidental farce and possibly a jig, they were satisfied. On the other hand, the standard of Elizabethan education was high enough to warrant the assumption that a large section of the audience was familiar with the classics and with the customary method of approach. And that approach was by means of close attention to the word."

Undoubtedly the arts of the screen and the stage differ. We do not expect or demand continuous dialogue in the cinema, and formalised or set speeches, except on rare occasions, are out of place there. That makes it all the more important that, when the spoken word is used, it should be the right word. Some day perhaps a Shakespeare of the screen will arise. His problems will be different from those of the dramatist, but he will solve them with an equal genius.

* See *Education and the Drama in the Age of Shakespeare.* By L. C. Knights. *The Criterion,* July, 1932.

WALLS! WALLS!

OR THE "AVERAGE" FRENCH TALKIE

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ALEXANDER WERTH

I HAVEN'T got the exact data; but it would probably be true to say that nine Paris cinemas out of ten are showing French talkies. And some talkies they are! The *avant-garde* cinemas—they call them "studios" for swank—and the cheapest and dirtiest picture houses in the working-class districts, where they still show only silent films, are the last refuges of real cinema in France; and even some of the "studios" have begun to specialise in rubbish.

I do not claim to have seen all the recent, or even most of the recent French films. During the past month or so I visited several cinemas which I had picked out at random, and without taking much notice of either title or producer. If my conclusion is unfair, then I can only say that I have been most unlucky. My conclusion is that the French cinema has reached the lowest depths of degradation.

With the exception of a handful of well-known French producers—whose work one hardly ever sees in Paris nowadays—the French to-day do not produce *cinema*, but only films. Just look at the list of titles. Out of ten films picked out at random, six are usually named after plays, three after novels, and only one has an original title. Perhaps those with the original titles are the worst of all. For these, too, are film "plays," only exceptionally bad ones. The camera work in all these films is as dead as a doornail. It simply doesn't exist. Here is an example, chosen among many.

The other night, being unable to find a foreign film on the cinema list (the import quota on foreign films has worked wonders) I decided to go and see a film called *Côte d'Azur*, which, I innocently thought, would contain at least some good shots of Nice, Cannes, Monte Carlo—admirable stuff for the camera. The thing is a sentimental farce about a wealthy *couturier* and his telephone girl, who is in love with him. The first half of *Côte d'Azur* takes place in the dressmaking

establishment in Paris, with the scene moving from the boss's office to the staircase, from the staircase to the sumptuous vestibule, from the sumptuous vestibule to the assistant manager's office, and from the assistant manager's office back to the boss's office. The whole thing is walls, walls and walls. And not even amusing walls, but the blankest, whitest, deadest, flattest and most meaningless walls you could imagine. For a moment I thought that this drabness might have been intentional—that it was meant to contrast with the glamour to come. Ah! at last! The boss gets into his car (the car again is set against the blank outside wall of the office) and drives off to the Riviera. The enamoured typist, dressed up in the most expensive clothes which the assistant manager has lent her, follows him, in the hope of vamping him on the strength of these clothes. At last! There is a shot of a car driving through Paris towards the station. Then another shot—a still of Nice—or very nearly a still, for only the leaves on a tree do something. And then the rest of this intriguing story takes place on a café terrace, and finally at a night club where we get the kissing scene between the boss and the typist. The end of the film takes us back to the Paris walls, where the final kissing scene occurs.

An important episode in the film is the shaving-off of the boss's moustache—a process which is meant to increase his chic-ness and sex-appeal. French producers seem to be crazy on this whisker stunt. I have seen, in the past week, at least three films where a shave works a miracle. The most glorious moment in a film called *Enlevez-moi*—this is supposed to have been a most successful film—is when the ridiculous worm of a scientist, who is interested only in stones and minerals, is transformed into a gigolo-like being by the combined efforts of a barber and a tailor. From that moment on he becomes irresistible. *Enlevez-moi* is exactly the same sort of thing as *Côte d'Azur* and dozens of other French talkies. It begins in a room in Paris, and ends in the Alps after passing through a hotel bedroom, where the worm of a scientist doesn't behave the way a film hero should behave. He makes up for it after shaving off his whiskers. In the Alps we get one or two stills of glaciers.

This is the sort of stuff we get every day at the cheap, medium and expensive cinemas of Paris. The French cinema, taken as a whole, is to-day nothing but talk against a background of walls. As a rule even the talk isn't good; it is a sort of cross between the French *petit-bourgeois* comedy of 1910 or thereabout and Hollywood—Hollywood at its worst.

Clever dialogue and even jokes are conspicuously absent—except in the adaptations of a few clever modern comedies, such as Marcel Pagnol's. When the actors have nothing more to say, they give us a song. It reminds one of Glasgow tea parties—when the conversation runs dry, Aunt Nellie is asked to sing a song, or little Nancy to play her piece. The singing in the French films, is, at its best, just a little worse than Maurice Chevalier. Even in the so-called funny films, the sentiment is maudlin to the last degree; it is as if they were trying to make the conventionalised slush of Hollywood sound genuine. You can imagine the result. As for the "social scheme"—with its contempt for the whiskered scientist, and the apotheosis of the tailor's dummy, and with its glorification of wealth and expensive clothes, and the *dot* (oh, that everlasting *dot*!)—it is more contemptible than the "social scheme" in any Hollywood product. For in this case, too, these things are made to sound serious. The average French producer—and the French *Paramount* is the type *par excellence*—has taken Hollywood standards and actually vulgarised them! Hollywood films have at least a certain liveliness and vitality, and an American tongue-in-the-cheek attitude. Translated into French, the slush remains, and the vitality and the tongue-in-the-cheek are lost.

How, one may ask, can this sort of stuff go down? It doesn't, in fact. Only there is a quota on foreign films, and in nine cases out of ten, people are given the French *ersatz*—the excuse being that there are no French talkies—or at least very few—made abroad. The public is, I think, getting bored with this French talkie stuff. When, by any chance, a foreign film—whether silent or talking—is shown somewhere, there is a rush. But foreign films in Paris are a rarity.

In any case I can honestly say that I have never yet heard a Frenchman express a really enthusiastic opinion on any recent French talkie. And I may also add that, for all the comic pretensions of the scenario writers, there is no laughter in the cinemas of France—only strained, half-hearted sniggers—feeble attempts to justify the cost of the ticket.

We are told that with France, Belgium and French Switzerland as their only markets, French talkies must be made at a certain minimum cost, or else they will not pay their way. That may be so. But one can scarcely believe that that is the only cause of their badness. The chief cause of their badness is primarily the lack of foreign competition. An open frontier would make the producers sit up.

THE FILM IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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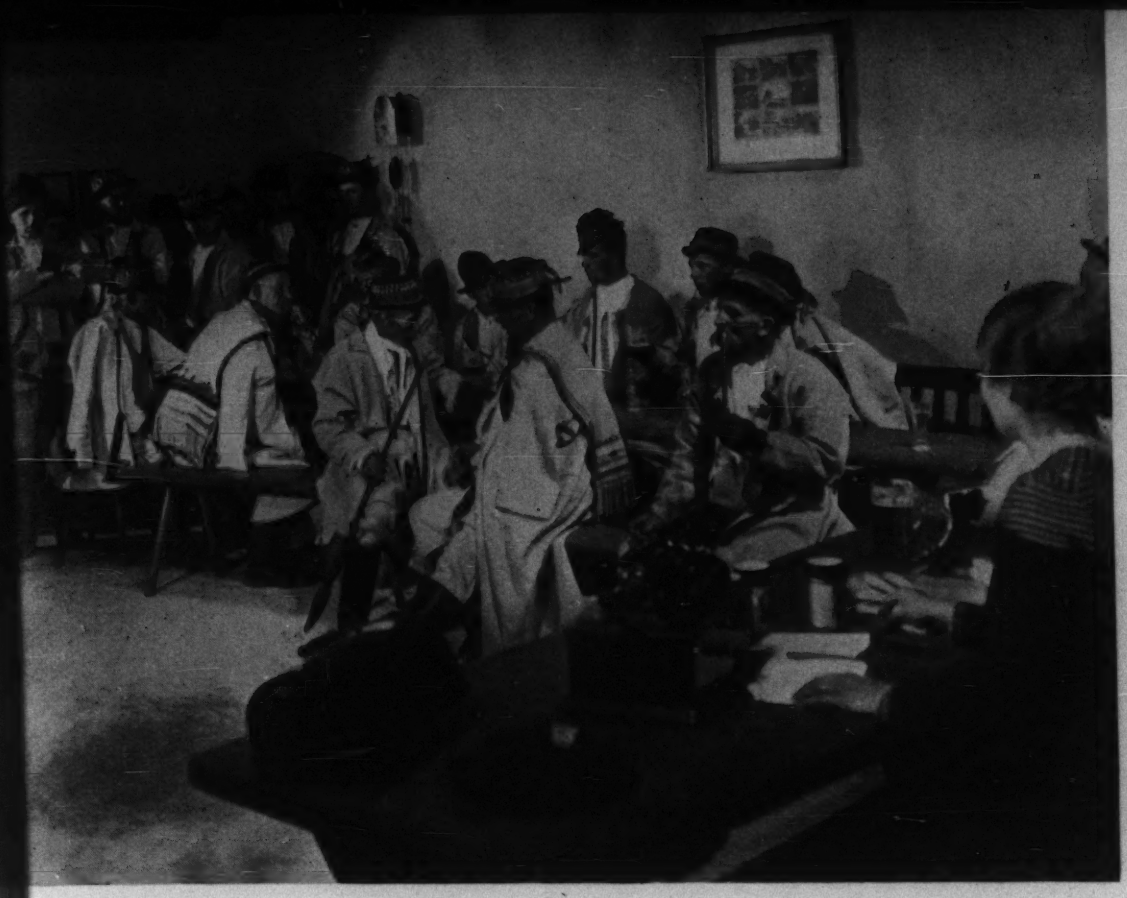
KAREL SANTAR

THE arrival of sound stimulated film production in Czechoslovakia to a greater activity than ever before. The reason was obvious: the Czech audience did not want always to see and hear foreign talkies, and the first full-length film in Czech, *Fidlovacka*, was very heartily acclaimed. Not only had this *Fidlovacka* patriotic tendency in showing the origin of a national hymn, but the characters spoke Czech dialogue and sang Czech songs. The public did not want more and the picture was a first-class box-office success. Artistically it was a complete failure.

Fidlovacka was followed in quick succession by many other films, though not all were so successful. By seeing and understanding *Fidlovacka,* the Czech audience were for the first time able to judge what a talking picture really was and could be. Full credit is due to the Czech public for its critical attitude, for in more than one case it laughed cheerfully during most dramatic scenes, and in one special case its criticism went so far that police assistance was necessary.

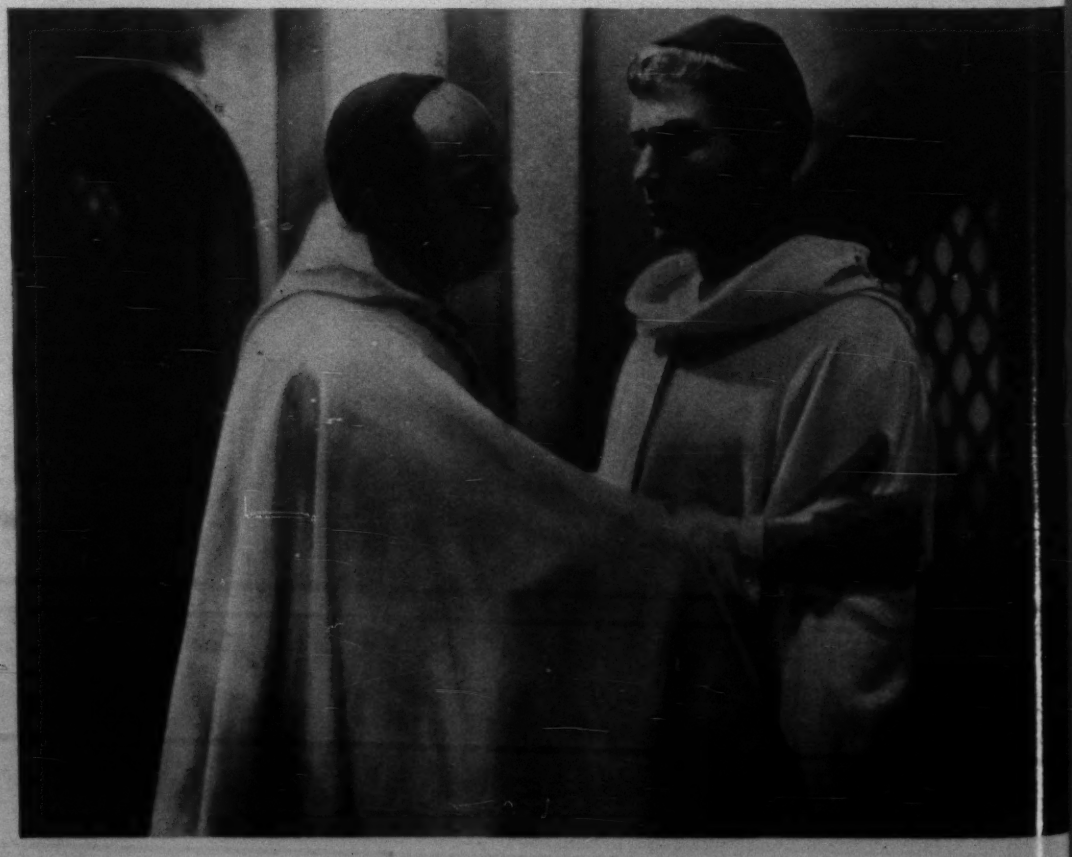
The early development of Czech sound films differed not much from the average productions of other countries, and only occasionally were there attempts to find the proper fusion of sound and movement, as in the works of Machaty or Inneman.

Among the more recent pictures which deserve attention is *Before Pass-Examination,* produced by the A-B-Film Co., Prague. This is the first Czech talking picture which really stands artistically high. Vladislav



From "Disappearing World," a sociological picture of peasant life in Moravia and Slovakia. Produced under the supervision of Professor Ulehla and distributed by A-B Films, Prague.

From "Zwei Menschen," Erich Waschneck's picture of the Tyrol which has as its theme the conflict between the call of love and the demands of the Church.—A Cicero Production.



Vancura, a prominent Czech writer who is the author of the story, wished to show in *Before Pass-Examination* student life to-day, and was lucky enough to put it forward in terms which can be universally understood, although the dialogue is Czech. His theme is not unlike Leontine Sagan's *Maedchen in Uniform.* Both these pictures show the struggle of youth against relentless mental uniformity and soldier-like drill, but they differ profoundly from each other in their way of approach. While in Sagan's picture uniform plays a certain exotic and attractive rôle, Vancura sees his boys and girls in everyday dress and puts their destinies against a present-day background. The main features of this film are optimistic in the viewpoint of school life, and so is its end. The youth naturally triumphs, and even the old pedant after having undergone the hardest examination of his life—the struggle with death—changes at last into a more human being. It is impossible to analyse here all the details of this picture as they deserve. It remains only to say that its director, Svatapluk Inneman, in collaboration with V. Vancura, produced a vivid work of art: his scenes in school are true-to-life, his players (real students, with the exception of the interpreters of professors) are human and natural. The dialogue is concise and not forced, the photography of V. Vich and Otto Heller excellent, the music of E. F. Burian appropriate to the theme.

Almost half of the other Czech films consists of comedies artistically uninteresting, except those of the two Prague comic players, Voskovec and Werich. As students, they began their career some years ago by founding the so-called "Liberated Theatre," which soon became very popular through the cultivated approach of its two chief interpreters to the problems of the day as well as through new forms of stage expression. They wanted "to liberate themselves" from all standard conventions in order to achieve a new and freer expression in stage decoration, costume, dialogue, and music. With the same intention they proceed now to the production of films. Their second picture, *Money or Life,* directed by Jindrich Honzl, attempts to parallel the ironical efforts of René Clair. It is necessary to say that they were only half successful. In comparison with *Powder and Benzine* they made a large step forward in using skilfully real filmic elements, but they did not achieve either the originality of Clair's plot construction or his supreme

directorial power over the theme. It is true, the American slap-stick comedy revives very happily in their film, but only in its old silent form: the promise to fuse it with sound remained only an attempt without any positive result.

From the remaining Czech productions I suppose two other films might interest British audiences. They are Karl Plicka's *On the Mountains and in the Valleys,* and Professor Ulehla's *Disappearing World.* Both are ethnographical pictures, not dry and descriptive documents, but made with true film sense. I have seen Plicka's *On the Mountains* several times and can see it again without fear of being bored. It is packed with unusually interesting material of the life of Slovakian people. There are pathetic scenes of old divine services under the open sky; ancient reaping; old technique of making gobelins; unusually funny and witty mountain-boys' games which represent ingenious and involuntary gymnastics; dances of girls; national costumes; and many other things linked together in a picture which never loses its tempo. Such scenes as those showing vinting or drying and working up of flax are unforgettable for their plastic value. Plicka himself is responsible for the excellent photography of this picture, which was unfortunately made as a silent but is now to be post-synchronised with original Slovakian music and songs.

Disappearing World of Professor Ulehla is a sociological study of the disappearing people's culture on the boundaries of Moravia and Slovakia. It has even a plot which tells about the arrival of a cultivated woman in a village to study folk songs, her relation to a peasant boy, and the impossibility of this relation to be lasting. Around this plot, which is on the whole only subordinate, turns the collective life of the village, portrayed in minute detail. This film is the result of the work of many collaborators under the guidance of Professor Ulehla.

The production of valuable shorts is rather scarce in Czechoslovakia. However, three short pictures produced only recently deserve some attention. They are *Burlesque* and *Construction,* directed by Jan Kucera, and Hackenschmied's *Prague Castle. Burlesque* is a film of no action, putting stress solely upon the rhythmic continuity of shapes of things. It culminates in violent movement only to slow up again. This pure visual impression is

emphasised by the music of Miroslav Ponc. In *Construction* Kucera endeavours to show the new methods of modern architecture, beginning with the architect's plans, depicting the seemingly aimless agitation during the construction and finally the complete monumental twelve stories building in which a whole city is concealed.

Hackenschmied's *Prague Castle* has for its theme a mixture of various architectural styles as they are to be found at Prague Castle. It is a successful attempt to connect formally music and image, the music being arranged by Frantisek Bartos. Heckenschmied is now at work on another film of the same sort, entitled *Sea and Winter*.

SOUND VERSION OF "RAIN"

In conjunction with the Synchronista studios of Paris, *Rain*, by Joris Ivens and Mannus Franken, has been re-edited and converted into a sound film. Lou Lichtveld, musical director of the Joris Ivens studios, has written the musical score. This is scored for chamber orchestra, consisting of flute, violin, alto, 'cello and harp, and introduces, for the first time, modern quarter tone harmonies to film art. Litchveld thought that the monotonous atmosphere of continuous rain is best expressed by these ultra-modern tonalities.

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Visie, the new Dutch film organization under the direction of J. de Haas, has now completed its first film *Fakkelgang* (*Torch-light Procession*) to the order of a prohibition society. The film, which will be generally released in a re-edited version of 2,000 feet, has been well received.

J. HULSKER.

FIRST BULLETIN OF THE INTERNATIONAL BUREAU OF THE NEDERLANDSCHE FILMLIGA

IN an International Circular dated December 1931, and one following in March 1932, we have published the attempts of the Nederlandsche Filmliga, to establish an International Bureau in the interests of the film society movement. We took as our starting point the following considerations:

There is too little co-operation between the film societies of different countries, the producers of *avant-garde* films, and finally between all who are interested in the film as art. This makes it often difficult for the film societies to get hold of those films which they would like to show to their members, while it is also disadvantageous to the work of the producers in not being able to attract the attention it deserves. The great expense entailed in making a film, particularly a sound film, can only be made good by a considerable number of performances. We therefore decided to compile a list of all existing film societies in the world, and of all *avant-garde* producers in different countries. It was also our intention to establish a central bureau which was to collect and publish news concerning films, film societies and cinéastes in a periodical Bulletin. This Bulletin would be distributed amongst those interested, while the Bureau would also undertake to assist with the circulation of artistic films.

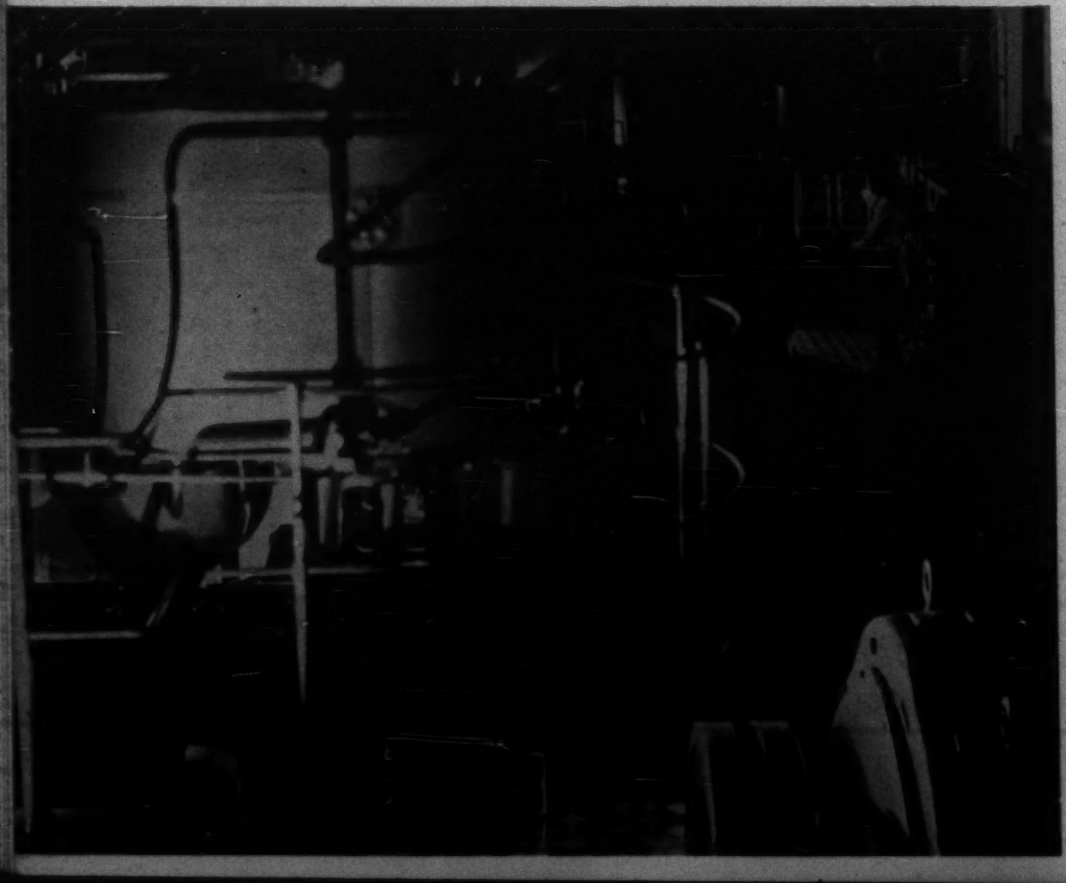
In order to achieve these ends, we made an appeal to all cinéastes and producers of artistic films to give us as much information as possible concerning the exploitation of their films (where and under which conditions obtainable, etc.) and the possibility of lending them directly to the Bureau. The films would then circulate in the various countries of Europe and America, maybe in a few other places as well, with the understanding that the rent, minus a certain amount for administrative expenses, would be made over regularly. The idea was not to start competition with those companies which let films on hire, but rather as an addition so far as it concerned films of artistic merit which they left out of exploitation.

From "Zwei Menschen." A mountain village in the Tyrol, which is the background for Erich Waschneck's new Cicero film featuring Gustav Froelich and Charlotte Susa. The photography is by Mutz Greenbaum, Richard Angst and G. Vitrotti.

From
"Voice of the World," a documentary dealing with the manufacture of radio sets and the influence of wireless.

Directed by
Arthur Elton.

Photography by
George Noble.



This is in short the information which we gave out in our circulars. Since then, many months have passed, and it is time now to publish the results of our efforts. The reasons why we have not done this sooner, by, for instance the publication of a periodical Bulletin—which has, until now, remained a wish unfulfilled—are due to many, partly quite unexpected difficulties, technical as well as financial.

We thought that this information regarding our activities was best to be circulated by publication in existing and well-known periodicals, dealing with the artistic film, and the Editors of magazines in various countries were kind enough to give us space to do so.

A. We may start by saying that our efforts have met with a lively interest in many countries. One of our first circulars has resulted in a fairly extensive correspondence which contained many expressions of approval and promise of assistance. Many supplied us with information regarding the artistic film movement in their country. We should like to take this opportunity, if we did not already do this by letter, to thank all those who did so for their kind assistance.

B. Another kind of correspondence grew up at the same time, because many foreign film societies, publishers of periodicals, etc., asked us for information regarding films, addresses of film producers, etc., or tried to obtain from us or through us, stills or films for showing to their members. With the attending to these requests, the real work of the Bureau has started.

The Bureau has not always been able to satisfy all demands made upon it. As it is only at the starting point of its work, it could not always command the information, addressess and connections which were necessary to answer the questions satisfactorily. Request for information by the Bureau itself often remained unanswered, photographs from periodicals were not always sent, and application for films could generally not be considered, a point we will come back to later under D.

On account of the prolonged absence abroad of Mr G. J. Teunissen, it was necessary to modify the management of the Bureau, and this has resulted in a delay of the correspondence. In many cases, however, the Bureau was able to act as a mediator, and supplied the needed information, thereby partly justifying its existence.

C. Regarding the financial assistance which we asked for in our latest circular, this was only given by one foreign society, the Cape Film Society of South Africa, which sent a contribution.

Many organisations, on the contrary, maintained that they could not afford a share of the financial burden. We should like to point out that, on account of this lack of assistance, the very existence of the Bureau is in grave danger.

D. Up to now the Bureau has been unable to distribute the films itself on account of difficulties concerning the exhibition rights. For the hire abroad of *avant-garde* films, the Bureau should have the World Rights, but these were not given to it. For the same reasons, it would seem that practical co-operation between film societies of different countries is impossible. It appears, therefore, that the work of the Bureau is to be limited to the giving out of information. To this end, however, the co-operation of all cinéastes is highly necessary, and we urgently repeat our request for more information.

The following is a list of *avant-garde* films, produced during the past year, particulars regarding the exhibition of which may be obtained from the Bureau (Director, J. Hulsker, Nieboerweg 214, The Hague, Holland) :—

HOLLAND: Jan Hin. *Kentering. Rome.* O van Niejenhoff. *Zee.* Niejenhoff and M. Franken. *Volendam.* G. J. Teunissen and Jo Spier. *Vrifdagavonf* (*Friday Evening*). "Visie" (J. de Haas, M. de Hass, and A. Keizer). *Fakkelgang.*

GERMANY: Wilfred Basse. *Abbruch und Aufbau. 65 Millionen.* Slaten Dudow. *Kuhle Wampe.* Oskar and Hans Fischinger. *Studien.* Heinrich Hauser. *Weltstadt in Flegeljahren.* L. Moholy-Nagy. *Alter Hafen in Marseilles. Lichtspeil. Zigeuner in der Groszstadt.* Oertel and Bamberger. *Die steinernene Wunder von Naunburg.* G. W. Pabst. *Die Herren von Atlantis.* Riefenstahl-Balazs-Schneeberger. *Das blaue Licht.* Walter Ruttmann. *In der Nacht.* Dr Solsky. *Burgersteig.* V. Trivas. *Niemandsland.* O. Woinof. *Deutsche Sinfonie.*

CZECHOSLOVAKIA: A. Hackenschmied. *Musik der Architektur.* Jan Kucera. *Burleske. Ein Film uber das Slovakische Land und Volk.* Vavra and Pilat. *Das Licht im Finstern.*

THE MISCELLANY

CRITICISM AND TEMPERAMENT.—The ultimate error indulged in by every film critic is in misconceiving the purpose of the screen medium. What the public have suffered from mostly for the past few years, at least those who are serious-minded souls, is having to read and accept quite seriously the fulminations—humorous, cynical, philosophic, "wisecracking,"—and the pseudo-ethics of film-critics who exercise their functions in the lay press.

Was it Lemaitre who said that all criticism was Art seen through a temperament? Or should it be "Art seen through a temper"? I am normally acquainted with the Press activities of the film critics. That is why I make bold to say that in almost every case, in default of an aesthetic for judgment of films they rely upon temperamental vagaries.

Let us for the fun of the thing make some rough estimates of the kind of temperaments that are broken on current pictures.

A, when he deigns to survey a film, usually produces a charming essay describing how the title or subject led him down the lanes of memories. B, is tremendously conscientious and eager to be fair, but his theatre experiences in brighter and more intellectual regions have dulled his mental appetite, and reveal that, as regards films, he suffers from mental dyspepsia. C, knows too much about theatrical technique to forget it. When he sees a film, he judges it by that standard. The Artemus Ward axiom is still his. "Films are but small potatoes and few under the hill." D, finds films either very good or very bad. He wears his heart very near his fingers. When he hates a film, the gall enters his fountain pen, and discharges venom. E, is more of a journalist than a critic. The reporter's passion for sensation is stronger than his logical faculty. His motto must be Nietsche's "The truth is my truth and nobody else's truth." F, must be the Peter Pan of critics. Joyously he wanders among the fields of asphodels—finding themes for his jocosity in the most meagre material. G,—films only exist for him for one reason—to offer a subject for an article apropos *des bottes*. H, is young enough to know everything, master and victim at once of a prodigious memory from which he contrives theme songs inspired by the titles of the films he views. I,—Criticism does not interest him, as his Editor has decreed that he must contribute peppy columns.

ROBB LAWSON.

SMOKE AND STEAM.—"Technical swagger too often misleads the critics into accepting as works of first-rate importance films entirely devoid of purpose or any idea of value"—was there ever a more obvious example than *Rome Express?* Here is a picture that is bowed down with the praise lavished on it by a hundred critics. It has been widely credited with brilliance and its director with genius. But when we look beneath the technical sheen, what do we find? No purpose at all but a paltry tale of a stolen picture, no idea but the use of a train as a setting for the thieving. *Rome Express* comes to the screen and goes, and all that is left behind is an impression of a cunningly contrived but not quite convincing background, and of much fine acting expended to small purpose. If, as has been claimed, this schoolboy's tale of train bandits is the best film ever produced in Britain, then we are yet but amateurs at the game.

WALTER LOTHIAN.

ON SHOOTING *THE NEW GENERATION*.—The main practical difficulties of documentary are usually the inflexibility of material and the external demands on the director in choosing material. So much must be selected, so much excluded, and material is often intractable.

In *The New Generation* we were up against children from the ages of three to sixteen, and we found that they were not such a tough proposition to shoot as we had thought. Provided due care was taken, particularly with the younger children, to shoot normal school activities wherever possible, rather than staged versions, they were less self-conscious and rather more intelligent than the average adult.

The children fell definitely into two groups: those aged three to eight (who didn't know the meaning of being filmed), and those aged eight to sixteen (who did). The former were quite unconscious of anything unusual going on, suffered themselves to be moved about, chairs, tables, games and all, *ad infinitum* without protest, seemed to notice nothing extraordinary in the full heat of lights, and never spoke a word. They were the director's model actors, doing what they were told, giving no trouble. The latter group (8-16) were far more conscious of themselves and the camera: some were either dumb or shy, and incapable of doing their daily actions with a camera turning on them; others were perpetually showing off (standing on their heads, etc.).

The adult sections of the film deal mostly with workers at their daily jobs. When this type of person is confronted with a movie camera, it is nearly always those engaged in technical jobs who are the quickest to realise what is wanted of them. Thus machinists, draughtsmen, stokers, miners, were pleased and amused to perform their own particular jobs for our benefit. But we soon found that any massed action in long-shot, involving departure from normal routine, was resented. We therefore fell back on concealed cameras for these shots wherever possible.

Working in a small provincial town among strange people calls, above all, for tact. Every facility and help is offered, sometimes to an embarrassing degree ("Why don't yer take a picture of the Town 'All?"), but on the other hand, the support of local influential people is essential, and great care must sometimes be taken in selecting material not to disregard their wishes. The problem is one of adaptation.

STUART LEGG.

WANTED: A MOTORING MOVIE.—Has any film been produced that captures the spirit of This Motoring? Most pictures introduce a car in some connection, but few make use of it in their structure—a notable exception being *The Marriage Bond*, a British film, in which the wrath of one of the characters was effectively indicated by the fierce way in which he let in the clutch of his sports car. Occasionally, American films of motor-racing have appeared, but track work has little of the camaraderie of the open road.

Motoring has been fairly well represented in comedy films, but it has beauty as well as comedy. The print of new tyres on crisp snow, the glint of headlights on telegraph wires, the staccato roar of rapid acceleration—these are subjects for poetry. There is poetry, too, in the very lines of many cars of to-day. No word-poet has yet done justice to This Motoring. Here are golden opportunities for the poet of to-day, whose medium is light, whose tool, the camera.

ALEC DAVIS.

(THE MISCELLANY *is at the disposal of readers and contributors for open discussion on matters raised in* CINEMA QUARTERLY *or elsewhere. Contributions, as a rule, should not exceed 300 words in length*)

THE CINEMA LIBRARY

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WRITING FOR THE FILMS—By L'Estrange Fawcett. (London: Pitman. 3s. 6d.) Mr Fawcett effectually exposes the treatment to which the average film-story is subjected by the studio "experts" during its progress towards production. An exposition as clear and vigorous as this is always acceptable, even though nothing seems to be able to pierce the armour-plated self-complacency of the producing companies. Beyond this, however, Mr Fawcett's purpose is a little vague. In the foreword he quotes some questions he is constantly being asked which have, he says, resulted in this book; but most of them remain unanswered. For the most part he deals only with the "treatment," the script, or full scenario, being expressly left out of account. "A new class of 'film-wrights' must be created" he says, and apparently these "film-wrights" will compose both story and scenario—which is, of course, the only correct method. But although he realises the essential difference between a film and a play, he seems to imagine that scenario-writing is a branch of literature. "It is all nonsense," he says, "to argue that authors would find it difficult to become film-wrights . . . novelists often acquire stage technique." But fiction and the drama, both of which use the medium of words, are much more closely allied than either is to the film, which uses the medium of pictures. In fact, a scenario is no more literature than is an algebraic equation or a record of a game of chess.

G. F. D.

A HISTORY OF THE MOVIES—By Benjamin B. Hampton. (London: Noel Douglas. 21s.) As only fourteen of the five hundred odd pages of this important-looking volume are devoted to European production, it would have been less misleading to call it a History of the American Movies. Mainly a chronicle of facts, figures, and personalities, of internal troubles and dissension, and of commercial exploitation, it reflects the development of the cinema not as an art but as a "fascinating industry," in the structure of which there is no place for a consideration of aesthetics or regard for any standard other than the measure of box-office returns. That,

however, does not prevent the author from believing, or trying to make his readers believe, that the cinema is "a triumph of democracy," responsible for a thousand and one benefits to humanity. "Street-walking practically disappeared when five-cent shows spread across the United States." That is a new one to me. Apart from its historical collection of nearly two hundred stills, the volume is mainly interesting for its naïve illumination of a certain American attitude to life and to the outside world.

N. W.

SCRUTINY OF CINEMA—By William Hunter. (London: Wishart. 5s.) This somewhat loosely constructed attempt to assess the cinema's present achievement consists of an introductory essay, "Towards a Criticism of the Cinema," reviews of historic and tendencious films, and a post-script on sound and its application. A balanced sense of values, clear reasoning, and an absence of journalistic film jargon, distinguish this pleasantly produced quarto, which, if it adds little that is new to our knowledge of cinema, should help the ordinary spectator out of the confusion which a reading of out of date and less critical studies frequently engenders. It is also recommended to precious and pretentious critics who "speak of *Storm Over Asia* as if it were on the level of King Lear."

N. W.

LEISURE IN THE MODERN WORLD—By C. Delisle Burns. (London: Allen & Unwin. 8s. 6d.) An interesting and valuable contribution to cinema criticism is made in the course of this review of leisure and its use in modern life. So often is the cinema dismissed, under similar circumstances, as a paltry pastime for the mob, that it is interesting to find an author defend with such knowledge and look forward with such faith in the potentialities of the film. Dr Burns points out that one effect of the cinema is to fix in a great number of minds similar ideas, and that while several of these are fantastic, the majority are by no means bad. The film has widened the minds of our generation, he courageously claims. "The mental world for a great number of children as well as adults is *fuller* than it used to be and also more similar." Emphasising the effect of this similarity in cinema, he argues that it diminishes distinctions between social classes. For the first time in a review of this kind, we find defended the supposedly most vulnerable aspect of cinema—the "sex" interest of films. "What is unhealthy in the 'sex appeal' of films," he writes, "is due to a disease or repression or com-

plex in contemporary society quite independent of the cinema: and the films so far from increasing may even relieve the strain."

F. H.

THE NEW LEARNING: An Experiment with Educational Films in the County of Devon. (London: Workers' Educational Association. 1s.) A report of the work of the Newton Abbot (W.E.A.) Film Society, which, apart from its usual Sunday exhibition of artistic films in a local cinema, recently undertook a six-week experiment to determine whether the interest aroused by films and the experience presented by the screen could be utilised to serve the general purpose of adult education. Twelve small villages in mid-Devon were selected for the experiment, and performances, by means of a portable apparatus, were given in the village halls at a charge of sixpence. The films, nine of which were silent and nine sound, were chosen to illustrate the problem of "Man and his Environment." The audiences, composed mainly of simple agricultural workers who knew little of the world outside their immediate surroundings, were invited to discuss the films and the problem after each exhibition. After some hesitancy, due to natural reserve, the villagers entered wholeheartedly into the spirit of the experiment, and it was found that whereas words are full of difficulty in teaching in a rural area, the film is a direct approach to the mind of the countryman and offers a mode of learning almost equivalent to first-hand experience. The main section of the report, which discusses in detail the films exhibited and contains much valuable information relating to the film and education, has been compiled by F. G. Thomas, to whose enthusiasm and energy the success of the experiment is obviously largely due. The Society has also ventured into production, and at Liverton, a hamlet on the edge of Dartmoor, the villagers acted in a film based on Ibsen's Peer Gynt and dealing with Peer's adventures among the Trolls. A still from this film appears on another page of this issue.

M. R.

FILM LADY—By James W. Drawbell. (London: Collins. 7s. 6d.) A neatly written story of life in the studios of Elstree and Hollywood by an author who realises that economy in words is the essence of good dialogue.

From "Woman," a new Soviet film dealing with the fuller life experienced by women in the modern state, directed by E. Dzigan.

Courtesy of Experimental Cinema.

Eisenstein amid the ruins of the Temple of a Thousand Columns in the central desert of Yucatan, during the filming of "Que Viva Mexico!"

From "Peer Gynt" an experimental film made by the Newton Abbot Film Society.

Photo. by Stuart Black

THE AMATEUR CINE MOVEMENT—By Marjorie A. Lovell Burgess. (London: Sampson Low. 5s.) A popular account of the growth of amateur film-making in this country, in which is included an amount of information and advice, valuable and otherwise, for tyros and enthusiastic clubites.

PHOTOGRAMS OF THE YEAR, 1932. (London: Iliffe. 5s.) Advertising begins to cast off its former odour of vulgarity and Cinema slowly raises itself towards the status of an Art: meanwhile the photographer learns from each of them, to the enlargement of his technical resources and the enrichment of his art. Everyone who is interested in photography should have a copy of this volume, which contains, within a singularly unattractive cover, a fine selection from the outstanding prints of the year, together with lists of the Photographic and Ciné Societies in this country, their Secretaries' addresses and other information.

CAMERA. Nos 1 and 2. (34 r. Lincoln, Bruxelles. 2 fr.). A new periodical with aims similar to our own and a distinguished list of contributors, published as the organ of the Fédération des Ciné-clubs de Belgique. The Editorial, almost aggressively outspoken in its attack on commercialism in the cinema, assures readers that its policy will be kept independent and its criticism impartial.

REVIEWS OF AMATEUR FILMS

The Editor will be pleased to receive copies of amateur films for review. Carriage must be paid both ways, and a preliminary letter is advisable. Though every care will be taken of films submitted, CINEMA QUARTERLY does not hold itself responsible for any loss or damage which may occur.

None of the films submitted during the last quarter were of sufficient general interest for notice in these pages, and have been dealt with by letter direct.

HOLLYWOOD SPEAKS

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ONCE IN A LIFETIME

Production and Distribution: Universal. Direction: Russell Mack. From the play by Moss Hart and George F. Kaufman. Length: 7,490.

HOLLYWOOD has been busy during the past quarter talking about itself. There has been a series of films depicting, more or less accurately, the film colony—romance, melodrama, comedy, burlesque and satire. The greatest of these is satire. In the others, Hollywood is used merely as a novel background for familiar themes. It serves the same atmospheric purpose as does Paris in the romantic comedies and the Gold Coast in the melodramas.

In *Make Me A Star, What Price Hollywood? Hollywood Speaks,* and *Movie Crazy,* Hollywood is not really "exposed," whatever the claims of the publicity people to that effect. Certain aspects suitable for treatment in comedy and drama—often good comedy and drama—are selected and used realistically; but the selection is done craftily so that while the apparent glamour of movie life and the affairs of the studios is emphasised, the inanities of the scene and subject are subtly concealed. The reason is obvious. Hollywood is not so admirable an institution that it can afford to parade its real self for the disillusionment of a million movie-fans. When it laughs at itself—except in *Once in a Lifetime*—its laughter is discreet and is directed only at those characteristics which are matters of secret pride. Hollywood speaks—but in language carefully censored.

Once in a Lifetime is the great exception to this discretion. These other films of Hollywood pale into meek and mild commentaries when ranged alongside the hard and swift satire of this play by Moss Hart and George F. Kaufman.

●

Where these pictures excused and apologised and were tactful in their picture of studio life, *Once in a Lifetime* exposes and ridicules ruthlessly the methods and members of the film industry.

Here, at last, we see Hollywood as it is, with the glamour gone and the illusions ripped away: a strange world of puerile pomp and empty display, where incompetent producers buy authors by the dozen and leave their purchase in cold storage, where genius is attributed to the dullest oaf in a company of imbeciles, and where films containing every conceivable idiocy are hailed by the critics as masterpieces.

No one is spared by the withering satire: producers, directors, technicians, players, critics, gossip-writers and fans are all guyed with the same malicious delight. And the authors of the play, having set out to scourge the folly of the film-world, do not tire in their task; the pace does not flag nor does their ingenuity in satire fail.

Once in a Lifetime was not made without protest in Hollywood. It is not likely that the cinema shall again give us so realistic a glimpse "behind the scenes at a film studio."

The quarter has not produced many notable films. Sweden and Japan, two countries of whose cinema we see little, have been represented by *En Natt* and *Ashes*. Germany has produced *The Blue Light, Barbarina* and *Rasputin*, and, in conjunction with Britain, *Tell Me To-Night* and *Happy Ever After*. From France have come the sharply contrasted *David Golder* and *Le Rosier de Madame Husson*. While America has shown its *Grand Hotel* and Britain its *Rome Express*, Russia has been silent, and we await with impatience Pudovkin's *A Simple Case*.

FORSYTH HARDY.

DAVID GOLDER

Production: Société Générale de Cinématographique. Direction: J. Duvivier. Length: 7,363. Adaptation from the novel of Irène Nemirovsky. Distribution: Film Society.

I liked this film enormously, though it is hard to say why. It is not particularly well made, and the interior sets have that peculiar shoddy atmosphere common to all French films, except those of Clair and L'Herbier. But it is informed throughout with a certain direct naïvété which goes straight to the point, says its say, and stops. It is the story of a millionaire financier who has risen from the

mob to a Napoleonic position. His only passion in life is to make money for his daughter, an unhealthy minx and abominably spoilt. He overworks himself, has a heart attack and has to give up work. He makes over all his money to his daughter in order to spite his loathsome wife, and then he goes bankrupt, cuts away from his whole family—even his beloved daughter, since he begins to doubt if he is her father. She visits him and informs him she can't marry her lover because he hasn't enough money, and is therefore going to marry a paunchy financier, whereupon he goes back into business and kills himself in making a fortune for her.

All very sordid—but redeemed first of all by Harry Baur's acting as Golder, and by the director's sincerity. There is a peculiarly lovely scene where the two gilded lovers are lying by a stream—with a £3000 Bugatti nearby: a countryman comes past singing, and the real country—landscapes and people at work—rises up at you out of his song. This sequence, though a little rough in its cutting, is a fine example of simplicity in direction. The last reel is rather too over-dramatised and becomes artificial, except for one close up of the dying man—about the lengthiest single-shot I have seen since Dovjenko's *Earth*. Harry Baur here gives a great portrayal of death; he makes you see the dissolution of the flesh taking place before your eyes.

Altogether a unique film: neither the subject nor the style is likely to be repeated. The sound is excellent and often very ingenious.

BASIL WRIGHT.

GRAND HOTEL

Production: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Direction: Edmund Goulding. With Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford, John Barrymore, Lionel Barrymore, Wallace Beery, Lewis Stone and Jean Hersholt. Length: 10,086. *Distribution: M.-G.-M.*

Grand Hotel is a difficult job in criticism. The difficulties have already been demonstrated by the critics. Never before, I think, have I read so much contradictory criticism of a single production. The comments ranged from "Screen Art at it Highest," in a *Morning Post* headline, to Sydney Carroll's "this much-boomed talking-picture version of Vicki Baum's novel is only worth seeing as a drum-beating exhibition of stars, seven in number, each and all of them miscast."

The stars themselves are a difficulty. As Lejeune pointed out, it is difficult for anyone inside the cinema not to feel to some extent attracted if not awed by the presence of so many stars in a single film; yet the canons of criticism demand that we should disregard the stars as stars and think only of the idea behind the film and the method of its expression. Here again the critical path is difficult; I had both read the novel and seen the play before going to *Grand Hotel*, and it was not easy, in approaching the film, to disassociate myself from impressions already formed.

Whether or not the theme will be convincing and successful for those to whom it comes fresh in the film it is impossible to say. Certainly the plot which Vicki Baum's novel provides appears disconnected, episodic and incoherent on the screen—not a plot but a mess of sub-plots concerned with a number of characters engaged in

activities united only by the accident of time and place—and by the comment at intervals of Lewis Stone that "Nothing ever happens in a Grand Hotel."

The aim of the novel was to represent a section of life as found in a huge hotel. Assuming the aim of the film to be similar, then individuality ought to have been subordinated to some extent in the general end. Instead individuality—the star—is rampart, and the film gives a series of familiar character studies—a self-centred financial magnate, a gold-digging typist, a temperamental dancer, a clerk out to enjoy the last few days of his life, and so on. The stars must not be confused with repertory players: while the former are trained to set their personalities in a mould, the latter adapt theirs to a hundred different parts in a season.

In *Grand Hotel* the stars, without exception, perform admirably, All except perhaps Wallace Beery, remain close to the personalities they have established. Edmund Goulding is to be congratulated on the successful clearing of a stiff hurdle of selection and emphasis—and on cutting the film so skilfully.

F. H.

ROME EXPRESS

Production: Gaumont British. Direction: Walter Forde. Art Director: A. Mazzei. Camera: Gunther Kraempf. Cast: Conrad Veidt, Esther Ralston, Joan Barry, Harold Huth, Cedric Hardwicke, Frank Vosper, Gordon Harker.

If this is the sort of production the new Gaumont British studios are going to turn out, we can look happily forward to an era of technical brilliance, clever observation, and good entertainment. Whether we can also look forward to some sensible subject-matter remains an open question.

Here, at any rate, is a first-class craftsman's job. The restrictions of the set (except for the opening scene, the whole story takes place on the train) might well have overpowered the interest of the story had not Forde concentrated every effort in building up the authentic atmosphere of a long-distance continental express. In every shot the impression of movement is retained, either by sound and vibration or by faint shadows passing across the set, but mainly by clever Dunning of passing scenery outside the windows. I think there is no doubt that this concentration on detail and atmosphere saves the film.

The acting—with a *Grand Hotel* cast—is very encouraging. The stagey atmosphere is disappearing, and it is noteworthy that the two best pieces of pure movie-acting came from two of our best stage-actors, Hardwicke and Vosper. Veidt is, of course, as grand as ever, and Gordon Harker's suburbanite is gorgeous.

But the real heroes of *Rome Express* are the studio technicians and the supers—especially the supers—from station passers-by to Cook's men and wagon-lit attendants. They never strike a false note.

Technically, and in a sense intellectually speaking, this film puts Forde into class A1. I would suggest, however, both to him and Gaumont, that there are in England things more important, more exciting, and no less box-office, than the Gare de Lyon and the P.L.M. Railway, on which the vast resources of Shepherd's Bush should be concentrated without a moment's delay.

B. W.

THE BLUE LIGHT

Production: H. R. Sokal. Direction: Leni Riefenstahl. Scenario: Bela Balasz. Camera: Hans Schneeberger. Distribution: Universal.

At the risk of appearing heretical, I submit that this film is a very good illustration of the unimportance of good photography in comparison with good direction and good construction.

The story was slight enough to begin with, and with bad continuity and very uncertain handling, Leni Riefenstahl succeeded in swamping it off the screen. Any remnants were blotted out by Schneeberger's coruscating filter-work. Very few people have succeeded in directing a film and playing a main part in it too, and I think Fraülein Riefenstahl underestimated the difficulties of it. At any rate, the dramatics are not there, and the poetics are too uncontrolled. The result is amateurish when it might very properly be naïve, and sloppy where it might have been simple and impressive. In fact, it's the cameraman's film, and therefore not a film at all. Still, the photography really is lovely, and Schneeberger would be a great find for some one who wanted to MAKE a film. Such cameramen, firmly controlled, could do marvels.

However, you should see this film, if only for the lovely images which pass before your eyes. But don't let them bamboozle you. See *War is Hell* immediately afterwards—its photography is ghastly, but it is a film.

B. W.

MEN OF TO-MORROW

Production: London Films. Direction: Leontine Sagan. Photography: Phil Tannura. Distribution: Paramount.

As recorded elsewhere in these pages, this is Leontine Sagan's first British film: an impression of life at Oxford and of the imprint made on a sensitive undergraduate by the University. I must take Ivor Montagu's word for it that Oxford undergraduates are like this, and that here is the real Oxford. Certainly while the film is at Oxford, it has both strength and conviction, and in one sequence—the interview between the senior proctor and the undergraduate, who has just published in his magazine a protest against hooliganism—it touches brilliance; as the undergraduate leaves the Clarendon Building and walks across the courtyard, the camera slowly rises to a row of weathered stone heads, who seem to grin at his misfortune. Outside Oxford, the film is less impressive, and more content to be a tale of love and jealously.

Despite minor shortcomings, *Men of To-morrow* ranks high among British films. Leontine Sagan's direction has a rare quality of sympathetic understanding, and as in *Maedchen*, she draws from the players performances that are notably efficient and natural. Her camera is always used with intelligence, and, with some lovely glimpses of Oxford's stately streets and riverside shots on the Cherwell, the film makes a fascinating contribution to the movement for bringing Britain to the screen.

F. H.

EN NATT

Production: Svenska. Direction: Gustaf Molander. Photography: Ake Dahlquist. Scenario: R. Hylten-Cavallius. Length: 6,400. *Distribution: A. P. & D. Co.*

Most of the characteristics of the early Swedish films—heavy, slow-moving theme, sincere acting and photographic beauty—are evident in Gustaf Molander's latest sound film. Only in *En Natt* the rather melodramatic theme has a vitality seldom found in former Swedish productions.

The story is of a soldier who loves a Russian mill-girl; when civil war breaks out, he fights for her class against his own. After capture, he is granted a night's freedom before being shot. These last hours he spends with the girl; her attempts to detain him and his unflinching devotion to honour give us something new and refreshing in dramatic motives.

Throughout the film there is predominant a lyrical beauty such as is found in most Swedish films. Allied to this is a driving force that derives largely from the Soviets. This is particularly noticeable in the scenes depicting the outbreak of war, in which low-angle photography and quick-cutting are effectively used. Molander has used his camera finely to heighten the emotional content of each scene, and everywhere there is evidence of a sure sense of pictorial values. In parts his direction is outstanding—notably in the sequence which shows the youth's awakening on the morning of his execution and his ride through the morning mists to the camp.

The acting is grave and sincere. Gerda Lundequist, who will be remembered for *The Atonement of Gösta Berling,* gives a fine performance as the soldier's mother.

B. Braun.

LOVE ME TO-NIGHT

Production: Paramount. Direction: Rouben Mamoulian. Cast: Maurice Chevalier, Jeanette Macdonald, Charles Ruggles. Distribution: Paramount.

It is interesting to observe Mamoulian's treatment of a Lubitsch subject. His main departure from the authorised version is in his insistence on fantasy rather than satire. Being a really brilliant director, he can bring it off; the opening sequence, a symphonic impression of a city awakening, is extremely delightful, while with the deer-hunt scene we are taken right into fairy-tale.

The story, however, is one of the stalest (the poor tailor who through love of Jeanette poses as a blueblood), and even Mamoulian's direction cannot disguise its age. It is questionable, too, if he is the right man to handle Chevalier, whose essence is a sauciness that is admissible only because it is French; he should never be allowed to be seriously in love.

Possibly, too, Mamoulian was not very enamoured of the naughtinesses which Paramount and the public demand. I thought I detected a certain lack of that *finesse* which is necessary to such scenes.

On mature consideration, this film appears as good Mamoulian, but only moderate Chevalier. It is at any rate pleasant entertainment. Charlie Ruggles, as his usual charming self, delivers a number of remarks whose import must have escaped the censor.

B. W.

TELL ME TO-NIGHT

Production: Gaumont-Ufa. Direction: Anatol Litwak. Photography: Fritz Arno Wagner. Distribution: W. & F.

With this film, Gaumont-Ufa might well claim to have set a new standard in screen "musicals"; as the second product of the German-British partnership it will reassure those who find *Happy Ever After* disappointing.

Too theatrical to rank high as pure cinema, it is nevertheless notable for its interpretation of mood by scenic background. Fritz Arno Wagner's deftly composed shots of snowy peaks and valleys, of shaking leaves and blossom, have the soft luminosity which one associates with German photographic art, and from them the slight love interest, not intended to be more serious than it is in most musical comedy themes, takes on almost the quality of an idyll.

Every foot of this film shows evidence of high technical skill. Brilliant craftsmanship sets off a rather familiar variation on the theme of mistaken identity. The background has been kept well in hand; though *Tell Me To-Night* will chiefly be remembered for the sheer loveliness of the scenes which unexpectedly enrich it at many points, it must be admitted that the narrative is never held up in order that we may gasp with delight at irrelevant impressions caught by Wagner's cameras.

What does hold up the story to some extent is the number of opportunities afforded by the plot for the display of Jan Kiepura's magnificent voice. He is among the top-notes more or less throughout the film, and to clear up the identity tangle, he finds it necessary to give a one-man performance of lengthy excerpts from "La Traviata," and other operas.

The light-hearted gaiety of *Tell Me To-Night* owes much to its cast. Sonnie Hale is remarkably good as a gentleman adventurer, and Magda Schneider, a newcomer, has ingenuous charm.

CAMPBELL NAIRNE.

BLONDE VENUS

Production: Paramount. Direction: Josef von Sternberg. Photography: Bert Glennon. Distribution: Paramount.

This latest film of von Sternberg's has a more brilliantly polished surface than any other that America has sent us this year. For an hour, the screen is filled with a succession of lovely images—finely assembled detail and imaginatively composed settings, photographed with a camera unusually sensitive. There are three shots that I have seldom seen equalled for sheer beauty of arrangement and quality of texture: a liner entering a dock at dusk, a train flying westwards through the night, and a close-up of a boy blowing a bubble. There is more pleasure for the eye in *The Blonde Venus* than in a hundred of its fellows. But what does the beauty ornament? A story of a wife, who becomes a kept woman for the sake of her husband, and a prostitute for the sake of her child.

As in *Shanghai Express*, Marlene Dietrich is the focus point of the film; and as in that film also, her every pose is magnificently photographed; she seems, without fuss, to accept the film for what it is—a background for her personality. Von Sternberg's direction is fluent. He grows more and more expert in making hokum good-looking.

F. H.

HORSE FEATHERS

Production: Paramount. Direction: Norman M'Leod. Photography: Ray June. Length: 6,367. *Distribution: Paramount.*

The Marx Brothers have lacked from the beginning a scenario-writer with sufficient imagination to create for them a realistic background to throw up their unique idiocy, and a director with sufficient power to shape their wildness into a wild logic. This film does not reveal the discovery of either. There are mad moments, expert wise-cracks, and a good climax with the Brothers as players at a football match; but the madness lacks method and the picture a plan. Pity, but 'tis true.

F. H.

THE LODGER

Production: Twickenham Film Studios. Direction: Maurice Elvey. Camera: Sydney Blythe and Basil Emmott. Art Direction: James Carter. Length: 7,685. *Distribution: W. & F.*

Hitchcock's version of this story was the first film which gave me any hope for the British cinema. I do not think Elvey's is so effective, but it gives me even more hope for the British cinema—simply because it is efficient, unpretentiously lavish of effect, well-directed, well-photographed, well-edited, and well-acted.

Elvey has thought out an ingenious new twist to the story, which brings the last reel very nearly into the *M* category. But in the early parts of the film, there is a slight tendency to overdo the suspense and the film drags a little.

B. W.

SHORTS

The following are recommended as being among the best productions of the quarter. Disney—*The Fox Hunt*, one of the best of the Silly Symphonies; *Mickey's Revue; Mickey in Arabia; The Beach Party.* Laurel and Hardy—*County Hospital*: if you are bent on laughter this should not be missed. Charlie Chaplin—*Easy Street* (re-issue by Radio). A detailed analysis of these films is obviously unnecessary.

VOICE OF THE WORLD

Production: New Era. Direction: Arthur Elton (E.M.B.). Camera: George Noble. 3 *reels. Natural Sound. Music. Sparing commentary.*

The most ambitious industrial documentary yet made in England. Shows rationalised processes of a large radio factory. A grand slam radio performance at the end introduces Austral, Constanduros, Claude Hulbert, Dawson, De Groot, Ambrose and his band, Sargent and the London Symphony Orchestra.

Shape.—(1) Preliminary of a world without radio. Bored citizens. Barrel-organ for monotony. (2) The power-station behind manufacture. (3) Rationalised industry at work rhythmically and percussively. Heavyweight effects of stamping machines. Big wheel aureoles for

workers. (4) Rhythmic opposite of delicate shimmering operations. (5) Assembly of material on increasing tempo of automatic conveyors. (6) Stop. Suspense of Research Department and experiment. Wobbly note background. (7) Crescendo of production and delivery. Intermediate period of suspense playing up testing processes. (8) World stops work in city and country. Goes home. Trains. Sound of trains. Element of distance. (9) Radio performance cut with different listeners. Switching off and on according to taste: done with humour. (10) Finale of Sargent conducting radio factory to music of London Symphony. Abstract machine stuff. Big heads of workers. Cross cuts of listeners.

The film interesting for its large-scale combination of processes. Gets across excellently the size of the industry and the variety of radio performance. But too symphonic a treatment (after fashion of *Berlin*) to indicate the dramatic character of the most revolutionary instrument of culture and opinion in the modern world. Concentration on movement and rhythmic good looks obscures *importance* of the instrument. The building and *delivery* of the instrument, the key to the situation, not dramatised sufficiently. The result powerful but less heroic. Elton possibly unappreciative of radio's social significance and therefore lacking in proper (aesthetic) affection for subject. This point important, as affecting almost all the tyros of documentary. Too damned arty and post-war to get their noses into public issues. Miss accordingly the larger dramatic themes possible to the medium. The film, however, puts Elton first among industrial documentary directors in this country. Sound effects at all times intelligent, but a lack of finish in the cutting prevents some of them achieving full effect.

J. G.

LICHTERTANZ (Op. 12)

Production: Oscar Fischinger. Direction: Hans Fischinger. Distribution: Film Society.

The illustration of music by abstract shapes, moving in perfect synchronisation with it, had already been hinted at by Disney before this series appeared. Their appeal is very definite, as they give pleasant satisfaction to eye and ear simultaneously without raising any issues whatever.

The chief danger which this type of abstract has to face is simply the difficulty of remaining abstract. Twice during this particular one I was reminded of eels and organ pipes—and it spoils the fun. The Fischinger technique is steadily improving, and their films are lovely—in small doses.

B. W.

FILM SUPPLY

Film Societies and other organisations wishing to get in touch with the distributors of any films mentioned in these pages may, in cases of uncertainty, address their letters c/o *Cinema Quarterly*.

THE FILM SOCIETY OF GLASGOW

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THE Film Society of Glasgow was undoubtedly a child of The Film Society of London. It owed its birth to a chance meeting in the prosaic atmosphere of the top deck of a Glasgow tramcar one morning in the early autumn of 1929.

Stanley Russell and D. Paterson Walker had always been interested in what—for want of a better name—I might call "intelligent" films, and when they chanced to meet that autumn morning Walker said to Russell: "What about forming a Film Society in Glasgow." Russell jumped at the idea and a few days later the wheels were set in motion. Russell brought in Charles Fraser and these three set about organising the Society. It was difficult to know how to get hold of the right people, but a circular was drawn up and some 100 copies were posted to men and women who it was thought might have an interest, calling a meeting for 5th November, 1929. That meeting, which was held in the private theatre of First National Pathe, Limited, in Glasgow, was attended strangely enough, by thirteen people, and there was passed a unanimous resolution for the formation of The Film Society of Glasgow.

Through the kind offices of Mr William Arthur, the Manager of First National Pathé, the Society obtained the use of their private theatre for its meetings during the season 1929-30. That little theatre which was situated in a basement in Union Street, accommodated exactly 100 persons, and as it was not a theatre licensed under the Music Hall Acts the Society during its first season was untroubled by Magistrates' Licenses and censorships.

The first meeting of the Society was held on 21st November, 1929, when that old standby of all Film Societies, *Caligari*, was screened. By that time the membership had increased to about forty, all cheerfully paying a subscription of £2 2s. During the first season in which nine meetings were held, the membership increased to between eighty and ninety. A speciality was made of French *avant-garde* productions, and among the feature films were:—*The Fall of the House of Usher, Finis Terrae, En Rade,* and *The End of St Petersburg.* The success which the Society enjoyed during its first season was due to a great extent to the help which was freely given by Miss Harvey, of the London Film Society, Mr Stuart Davis, of the Avenue Pavilion, and Miss C. A. Lejeune.

At the beginning of the second season it was apparent that arrangements would have to be made to find larger accommodation in a theatre provided for sound, and after a good deal of trouble the Society secured the use of the Gem Cinema.

The second season was not too successful. The membership increased only to 120, and the Russian films which frequently appeared in the programmes did not appeal to the majority of the members, who considered them too depressing.

The third season, which saw the name of Charles Oakley added to the Council—an event which perhaps marked the turning point of the Society's fortunes—was also held in the Gem Cinema. At the first meeting the Society showed *Le Chemin du Paradis,* which was an instantaneous success and received a good deal of notice in the Press. This gave a fillip to the membership which by the end of the season had reached 200. Among the films deserving of special mention besides *Le Chemin* were *Le Million, The Blue Express, Cain* and *Mutter Krausen.*

The Council of the Society faced its fourth and present season confronted by quite a few problems. It had been their policy slowly to reduce the subscription as the membership increased. Thus while the subscription was £2 2s. in the first season, it was 35s. and 25s. during the second season, and a flat rate of 25s. during the third season.

The Council felt that with a population in Glasgow and district of nearly one million and a half, a membership of 200 was very discouraging, and they were determined to try and solve the cause of the poor support. As a result they determined on the bold policy of cutting the subscription to 12s. for eight meetings, and taking a larger and much more expensive picture house in the centre of the city, namely, the King's Cinema, in Sauchiehall Street. This policy has been amply justified. As I write, the membership is well over four hundred, and is increasing daily.

In concluding, it should perhaps be mentioned that all the Society's meetings are held on Sunday evenings, and that at least eight meetings are held each season in addition to lectures, exhibitions, etc.

A word of thanks is due to the Glasgow Magistrates for the broadminded way in which they have dealt with the Society's applications, and the few obstacles they have put in its path.

D. Paterson Walker.

THE CAPE FILM SOCIETY

The Cape Film Society was founded in June, 1931, and began its activities by showing Pudovkin's *Mother*, followed by *The Post-Master* and *Ivan the Terrible.*

Considerable interest had been aroused in the Society, and this was further stimulated by the announcement of the film which was to open the 1932 session. This was *The Blue Angel*, by Josef Von Sternberg, a picture which, by being banned, had enjoyed considerable Press controversy. This was followed by *Faust*, which was shown under the patronage of the Consul-General for Germany on the occasion of the Goethe Centenary Celebration; *Underground; The Loves of Jeanne Ney; Sergeant Grischa; The Ice-Breaker Krassin;* a repeat performance of *Mother;* and *The Wonderful Lie.*

The chief difficulties which the Society has to face are those connected with the obtaining of films, and the officials are eager to get into touch with any person or organisation able to negotiate the hire or purchase of suitable sound or silent pictures.

The Cape Film Society has been endeavouring, since its inception, to stimulate interest in the formation of similar societies in other parts of the Union. There seems little doubt that sooner or later a chain of film societies will be established all working together for the common aim. Durban, Johannesburg, Pretoria and Port Elizabeth all have a number of people who are working to organise film societies. The Hon. Secretary of the Cape Society is Miss H. Purwitsky, P.O. Box 2711, Cape Town, South Africa.

THE FILM SOCIETY, London, in its first performance of the season, shows no falling off in the variety or interest of the films presented. Applications for membership should be made to Miss J. M. Harvey, 56 Manchester Street, London, W.1.

Programme for October 30. *Pioneer Days.* Mickey Mouse. (Ideal). *Symphony of the Streets.* Swedish. (Film Society). *Musical Abstract.* Fischinger. (Filmophone). *Spicer-Dufay Colour Process.* (Spicers Ltd., Sawston, Cambridgeshire). *Harlequin.* Reiniger. (Film Society). *Le Rosier de Madame Husson.* Deschamps. (Film Society).

November 20. *Screen Souvenirs.* (Paramount). *Lichtspiel Schwartz-Weiss-Grau.* Moholy-Nagy. (Film Society). *The Imperial Russian Family, c.* 1912. (Film Society). *The Beach Party.* Mickey Mouse. (Ideal). *Ashes.* Japanese. (Film Soc. Federation).

THE FILM SOCIETY OF GLASGOW since reducing its subscription from 25s. to 12s. 6d. has more than doubled its membership. The Hon. Secretary is Mr D. Paterson Walker, 127 St Vincent Street, Glasgow, C.2.

October 16. *Rain.* Ivens. (Film Society). *Cinderella.* Reiniger. (Film Society). *Westfront, 1918.* Pabst. (Film Society).

November 6. *We Take off Our Hats.* Hughes. (Wardour). *Laugh and Learn.* (F.S.G.). *Jean de la Lune.*

November 27. *Romance in a Pond.* (Brit. Instructional). *The Clock Store.* Disney. (Ideal). *Uberfall.* Metzner. (Film Society). *Der Hauptmann von Koepenick.* (Nat. Distributors).

OXFORD UNIVERSITY FILM SOCIETY continues to flourish. Performances are held in the Electra Palace on Sunday evenings.

October 16. *The Swallow Tail Butterfly.* (Stoll). *Another Fine Mess.* Laurel and Hardy. (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer). *Jean de la Lune.* (Nat. Distributors).

October 30. *Tom's Strategy.* Pre-War. *The Flying Coffer.* Reiniger. (Film Society). *Brumes d'Autumne.* Kirsanov. (Film Society). *Cinderella.* Berger. (Wardour).

November 20. Excerpts from *Waxworks. The Beach Party.* Mickey Mouse. (Ideal). *En Natt.* Swedish. (Film Soc. Federation).

November 27. *The Schoolmistress and the Waif.* Mary Pickford. Pre-War. *The Great Pie Mystery.* Mack Sennett. *The Spider and the Fly.* Disney. (Ideal). *David Golder.* Duvivier. (International Productions).

THE LEICESTER FILM SOCIETY, in addition to having lectures by Anthony Asquith, John Grierson and Ivor Montagu, is co-operating with Vaughan College in the provision of a University Extension Course on "The Theory and Technique of the Film." The lectures, which are to commence in January, will be given by H. J. R. Lane, and will be illustrated by films.

October 8. *Southern April.* (E.M.B.) *War in the Trees.* (Brit. Instructional.) *We take off our Hats.* (Wardour.) *Westfront,* 1918. (Film Society.)

November 5. *Playtime at the Zoo.* (Brit. Instructional). *Radio Europa.* (Film Society). *Music Mystery.* Fischinger. (Filmophone). *Cain.* Poirier. (Gaumont).

EDINBURGH FILM GUILD opened its new clubroom with an exhibition of British Film Stills, assembled by Forsyth Hardy, to

illustrate tendencies in contemporary production. The catalogue, which contains very full details of over eighty films, is a useful work of reference. On November 25, the first of the season's lectures was given by A. E. Haswell Miller, who spoke on "The Cinema from a Painter's Standpoint." The opening performance of the Guild's series of special performances for children, at which *Stampede* was shown, was an unqualified success, and the cinema was filled to capacity.

October 23. *More Ghost Strains.* Ideal Cinemagazine. (Ideal). *In der Nacht.* Ruttmann. (Film Society). *Music Mystery.* Fischinger. (Filmophone). *Easy Street.* Chaplin. (Brit. Instructional). *Cain.* (Gaumont).

November 13. *Shale Mining.* (E.M.B.). *Potemkin.* (Arcos). *Killing the Killer.* (Wardour). *Alone.* (Film Society).

BIRMINGHAM FILM SOCIETY continues its successful career with Professor E. R. Dodds as President, and S. G. Hawes, 163 Pershore Road, as Hon. Secretary. Seven meetings in all will be this session in the Hampton Cinema, and the subscription remains at 10s. 6d.

October 30. *The Town of To-morrow.* German. *A Nous la Liberté.* (Universal).

November 13. *The Italian Straw Hat.* René Clair. *Mutter Krausen.* (Film Society).

BILLINGHAM FILM SOCIETY is probably the only society with no formal subscription. The admission prices to each performance are 7d., 1s. 6d. and 2s. Attendances sometimes number over 600. The Hon. Secretary is A. Hudson Davies, 12 Fieldfare Lane, Norton-on-Tees.

October 19. *Radio Europa.* (Film Society). *Lower Danube.* (Film Society). *A Nous la Liberté.* (Universal).

November 16. *Tabu.* (Paramount).

SOUTHAMPTON FILM SOCIETY is to give three performances of silent films and three of sound during its second season, and is forming a special lecture and discussion group. An exhibition of stills held in October received much public support.

December 4. *The Flight Machine.* (Brit. Instructional.) *Music Mystery.* Fischinger. (Filmophone.) *In the Studio. I.—Sound* (B.I.P.) *Le Million.* (Universal.)

ETON COLLEGE FILM SOCIETY continues to receive enthusiastic support though still able to show only silent films.

October 8. *Underground.* (E.M.B.) *Easy Street.* (Brit. Instructional.) *Pitz Palu.* (Universal).

November 19. *Berlin.* (Wardour.) *The Italian Straw Hat.* (Universal).

MANCHESTER AND SALFORD WORKERS' FILM SOCIETY successfully continues its policy of showing films of social significance. The Hon. Secretary is T. Cavanagh, 86 Hulton Street, Salford.

October 29. *Alone. In der Nacht. Rain.* (All Film Society).

November 19. *Mutter Krausen.* (Film Society). *Finding His Voice.* (Western Electric).

THE AMATEUR FILM MAKER

WANTED: SCENARIOS

MICHAEL ROWAN

WHAT is wrong with the amateur film movement? Serious workers may well ask the question, for though there are now some two hundred societies devoted to the production of films on sub-standard stock, only two or three films of consequence or promise have resulted from the miles of celluloid they have exposed.

What is wrong? Several things. To begin with, perhaps ninety per cent. of the societies have as little artistic intention, and generally less competence, than the countless "operatic" societies, whose members' main concern is to get behind the footlights and see their names on a theatre programme. Most ciné societies provide either "good fun" or a safety valve for the egotism of self-satisfied dabblers. Technical inefficiency, poor acting ability, and a total lack of knowledge of the essentials of cinema are apparent in all their productions.

But what is wrong with the other ten per cent. of the societies? Not technical incompetence, for their camera work is often surprisingly efficient, and finish, as in the case of Ace Movies, is frequently polished to a high degree. Direction and cutting, as in such films as the Preston Society's *Pylons,* is occasionally both imaginative and capable. Acting is more often a source of weakness, but it also is sometimes of a fairly high standard.

No, it is none of these things. They have all the resources with which to turn out good work, but, like the commercial studios, they are content to waste their talent on indifferent, if not puerile, subject-matter.

The reason, after all, is not far to seek. The societies which are turning out good-looking work are composed mainly of members interested in technicalities and photography. I do not say that they lack imagination or even the ability to produce a good scenario, but I am convinced that their interest is concentrated to such an extent on the paraphernalia of production that they cannot devote sufficient attention to their abstract material—theme and plot—upon the careful choice and arrangement of which depends whether their efforts will have any artistic value whatsoever.

The scenarist, I believe, has not been sufficiently encouraged in the amateur movement. By scenarist, I do not mean a writer of elaborate dramas; if properly handled there is an adequate market for these amongst the professional producing companies, whose achievements the amateur should not attempt to ape. By scenarist, I mean, rather, one who realises both the limitations and the opportunities of the amateur, and can put down on paper, themes, treatments, abstract ideas which the amateur producer can translate into filmic images. Acting there may be (though the less the better), but it should be of a nature which any suitable "type" could interpret rather than rôles calling for Barrymore histrionics. But documentaries and surrealiste experiments need equally careful scripting . . . and is it not for the amateur to experiment with the cinematic equivalent of the short story?. . . and what of the ciné poem?

Amongst the readers of *Cinema Quarterly*, if anywhere, will be found potential scenarists, whose ideas can be of use in helping to raise the standard of amateur production, and I have convinced the Editor that an appeal to readers to submit detailed or sketch scenarios would find a ready response. I know that many societies will welcome the opportunity of considering suitable scripts for production, and if they will write stating the nature of their requirements, suitable MSS. will be sent for their consideration.

No prizes and no payment is offered. No fees are demanded. Outstanding contributions may be selected for publication, and a general review of the entries will be included in these pages at a later date.

(*All communications must be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope. No responsibilty is accepted for MSS. submitted for the consideration of societies.*—EDITOR.)

HELPING THE SOLITARY WORKER

THE amateur cinema movement, in common with many other amateur movements, has suffered much from misrepresentation by its highly vocal but entirely unrepresentative societies. With a few notable exceptions, these scattered groups are almost entirely devoted to the one activity least likely to benefit from co-ordinated amateur effort—conventional screen drama or comedy.

It is doubtful whether even one per cent. of the owners of amateur apparatus have the slightest desire, much less the ability, to take part in a conventional screen production, but a growing proportion of such camera owners are coming to realise the immense potentialities of their apparatus as a

FEDERATION OF BRITISH FILM SOCIETIES

The Council of the federated film societies, for whom Miss J. M. Harvey, 56 Manchester Street, London, W.1., is acting as secretary, is now settling down to its principal function, that of securing and distributing suitable foreign films to constituent member societies. The Japanese film *Ashes*, and *Lichtertanz*, a Hans Fischinger musical abstract, are already available, and negotiations regarding several other films are in progress. It is hoped that *Kuhle Wampe* and the Swedish sound film *En Natt* will soon be available. The Council is also compiling a list of suitable films which are obtainable from other sources and is collecting information which will be useful in the formation of new societies.

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IN GREAT BRITAIN

* * *

MARJORIE A. LOVELL BURGESS

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G. A. ATKINSON

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